

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

Office of Public Relations
Galloway Twp., NJ 08240

“Journey of the Tracks” Brings Stockton Full-Circle in Expansion of Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center

Authentic Railroad Tracks Over Which Holocaust Victims Were Transported to Arrive at The Richard Stockton College of NJ on Friday, October 3rd at 1:00 PM

For Immediate Release

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Galloway Twp., NJ – The Holocaust Resource Center at the Richard Stockton College of NJ is in the midst of its first major expansion and renovation since its 1990 founding. The project will double the Center’s size and offer more learning opportunities for educators, students in grades kindergarten through 12, and undergraduate and graduate college students. The expanded opportunities include workshops and seminars for teaching character education, prejudice reduction, and the history of the Holocaust and other genocides. Enhanced areas for study and research and electronic classroom technology will be updated. In essence it will soon be an entirely new Center.

In the spring of 2006, focus groups met at Stockton to review the architectural plans of Martin Blumberg who was designing The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. The focus group members were Holocaust survivors and their families as well as community leaders. The focus groups wanted an entrance that conveyed the impact of lessons within the The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center. Architect Martin Blumberg suggested a design that incorporated railroad tracks into the entrance to the Center. The tracks would be symbolic of the network of trains in Europe during World War II, the chief mode of transportation taking Holocaust victims from the ghettos to the death camps. Blumberg contacted a railroad track company that supplied Amtrak to obtain the rails to be used in the design. “It was a great idea,” Gail Rosenthal, Director of the Center said, “an idea worthy of authentic tracks used in the *Shoah*.”

College President Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Dean of General Studies, Dr. G. Jan Colijn, and the Holocaust Resource Center Executive Committee and a myriad of community supporters made this vision a reality.

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One of the first calls made was to Dr. Michael Berenbaum, a former Ida E. King Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies at Stockton. Dr. Berenbaum is best known as the Project Director for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and President of the Survivors of the *Shoah* Visual History Foundation. He agreed to become Stockton’s consultant on the project. With that, Stockton embarked on a year-long process to obtain the tracks, which culminates this **Friday, October 3rd, with their 1:00 PM arrival** from Poland to the campus of the 7,000-student public liberal arts and professional college.

Stockton’s plant management team headed by Facilities Director Donald Moore understood the importance of the project and pledged to do whatever they could to assist in the cost of acquisition, transport and installation of the tracks. “Some projects we do are more than bricks and mortar,” Moore said. “Projects like this one, are directly tied to the heart and soul of the institution.”

“Dr. Michael Berenbaum’s dedication, cooperation, and expertise were essential in obtaining the railroad tracks,” Rosenthal said. “At every turn, he was there for us, making the right calls to the right people.” Through Berenbaum’s efforts, authentic tracks from the Bialystok area in Poland, were located. Berenbaum purchased the tracks himself and donated them to the College. The four 20-foot sections of track, each weighing 600 lbs., will be suspended over the entrance to the Center and will extend into the Center itself.

The tracks were removed from a railbed in the region of Bialystok, near where the Nazi regime established the third largest Jewish Ghetto. It was a central point in the network of rail lines moving the victims to the Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Theresienstadt and Majdanek concentration camps. “At a minimum, hundreds of thousands of the almost three million Jews who were murdered in Nazi death camps came through the area where these tracks originated,” said Colijn. Stockton officials and Berenbaum worked in concert with the Polish government, Museum for the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, customs officials and shipping companies in Poland and the US to secure the tracks. From Bialystok, the tracks were loaded on a flatbed truck and shipped to the Polish port city of Gdynia. A professional videographer in Poland was engaged there to chronicle the tracks’ journey. The tracks were then placed in a cargo container and loaded onto a freighter owned by the firm Maersk, one of the largest shipping companies in the world. The freighter journeyed to Hamburg, Germany, and its cargo was transferred to the SS Glasgow Express. The Atlantic crossing took about a week, with the rails arriving in New York Harbor and eventually at a port at the New York Container Terminal.

“The cargo was treated with respect and dignity every step of the journey,” Rosenthal notes, “It was treated as something valuable, a piece of evidence for education about the Holocaust to future generations.” Rosenthal credited Ron Beckerman who is Branch Manager of Damco, a freighter forwarder company for Maersk and Jim Devine who is President and CEO of NY Container Terminal. Despite heightened security since the events of September 11, 2001, Brian Iacone, an Emmy award-winning photojournalist, was permitted to document the railroad track arrival in NY Harbor. That arrival is when the journey took some surprising turns. Ms. Rosenthal and Mr. Iacone were told there was no way of knowing which container among the thousands loaded on the ship contained the rails.

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However, word soon came back that the rails were in fact located in a container at the very top of the stacks. Located almost instantly, the container was surrounded by other containers emblazoned with the Star of David and logo of the Zim Line, an Israeli shipping company. According to Ms. Rosenthal, “We were told the Zim’s containers are not often loaded onto the SS Glasgow Express in Hamburg. And here they were completely surrounding our railroad tracks.” A huge crane was used to lift the container containing the tracks, but the containers from Israel had somehow adhered to the container with the rails. It took four passes by the crane before the container could be extricated from the containers from Israel. “We were told that was a very unusual occurrence,” Rosenthal said. In one final twist of irony, the tracks arrived just before the Jewish High Holidays.

One of the first facilities of its kind at a public college in the United States, the Center was named in honor of Holocaust survivors Sara and Sam Schoffer, parents of donor Leo Schoffer, who contributed \$500,000 —the largest single donation in the history of the College. A separate room, made possible by a \$250,000 gift of the Azeez Foundation, was named in honor of Holocaust survivor Professor Liviu Librescu, the professor who sacrificed his life to save his students during the shooting spree at Virginia Tech in 2007. A third major donation, from Mr. Jack Koopman of the Netherlands, in the amount of \$100,000, has also supported the Center.

According to Dr. Michael Berenbaum, “Railroads were indispensable to the Holocaust. At first the Nazis murdered Jews by sending mobile killers to stationary victims, moving into towns, villages, and hamlets and murdering the Jews one-by-one, town-by-town, and city-by-city. When this method proved too difficult to sustain, the process was reversed – the victims were made mobile and the killing centers stationary. The entire process was industrialized. Killing centers were established on major railroad lines. Auschwitz had 44 parallel railroad tracks – by comparison to New York’s Penn Station, which has but 21 –it is because of its rail line infrastructure that Auschwitz-Birkenau became a killing center.”

For questions and additional information, please call (609) 652-4542.

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