

## **Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage Offers Exhibit on Training Farm for WWII Jewish Teens**

***For Immediate Release; Media invited to reception July 31 with survivor Ann Leus Strauss; invitation attached***

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**Galloway Township, NJ** -The Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage announces a new exhibit now on display through mid-September that depicts the story of Gross-Breesen, an agricultural training farm for Jewish youth that was established in 1936 on the German/Poland border.

The development of Gross-Breesen ultimately became the key to the survival of almost 150 German-Jewish students from the tyranny of Nazi Germany. Learning agriculture as a trade provided the students with the means to be employable when applying for immigration to countries whose borders were not closed to Jews in the years between 1936 and 1942.

The exhibit, titled "Up Close and Personal," offers an inside view into the daily lives of the young men and women who were fortunate enough to find themselves in Gross-Breesen.

In addition to their agricultural training, each student received a balanced education in mathematics, science and the arts. With great courage and hope, they carried "the Gross-Breesen Spirit" with them as they embarked on their journey to freedom beyond the borders of their young lives. Armed with a strong work ethic and moral code, these teenagers were also steadfastly linked to their Jewish culture.

About 100 students attended at any given time and a total of 240 students passed through the school.

On the night of November 9, 1938, the night of Kristallnacht, the Gestapo raided the farm and arrested most of the boys and staff and took them to nearby Buchenwald. Although they were released from the concentration camp and allowed to return to Gross-Breesen, the students quickly sought to secure emigration. Thirty-one went to Australia and others left for what was

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then Palestine, Kenya, England and Argentina. Thirty-seven went to the United States to work on a communal farm in Burkeville, VA established by Jewish businessman William Thalhimier and his cousin, Morton.

Despite the efforts to secure safety for all the students, tragically about half of the Gross-Breesen children perished in the Holocaust.

Serving as the Cape May County Teaching Center for the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust and Genocide Education, the Sam Azeez Museum shares a unique link to Gross-Breesen.

In 1891 and under the auspices of the German philanthropist Baron Maurice DeHirsch, 40 Russian Jewish immigrants arrived in the barren forest of northwest Cape May County to establish an agricultural community in what is called Woodbine, NJ. The largest and most successful of the Baron DeHirsch colonies, Woodbine became a haven for Jews seeking religious and economic freedoms and was recorded as the first fully Jewish-governed community since the fall of the second temple. Woodbine was called "little Jerusalem" and grew to a population of nearly 2000, mostly all Jewish residents.

The eventual demise of the farming theory led to industrialization, which provided employment opportunities to other immigrants as well. By the mid-1930s, Woodbine boasted a multi-cultural population comprised of Italian, Ukrainian, African American and Hispanic families.

During the same time span that Gross-Breesen was preparing German-Jewish youth to emigrate to life-saving lands, Woodbine received 25 German Austrian families who were fleeing the tyranny of the Nazi regime.

After World War II, Woodbine opened its arms to about 18 survivor families from concentration camps and displaced person camps in Europe.

The Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage was part of a \$5 million donation to The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, the largest gift in the college's history, by the Azeez Foundation in 2011. The museum was established to preserve the rich history of the town and to memorialize another link in the chain of Jewish continuity.

Gross Breesen too is a link in the chain of Jewish survival. The Gross Breesen Gallery will be open at the Sam Azeez Museum until mid-September.

For information and hours, call Jane Stark at 609-861-5355 or email [jbstark43@gmail.com](mailto:jbstark43@gmail.com)

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