

Lest They Forget: Names of Holocaust Victims Read Aloud Annually

By Felice Caspar



Photo courtesy of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington.

Teens participated in the “Unto Every Person There Is a Name” program at the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia in Fairfax, Virginia.

On Yom Hashoah, the program known as “Unto Every Person There Is a Name” provides an opportunity for communities to assemble and remember the victims of the Shoah by reading their names aloud. Since 1989, B’nai B’rith International has been the North American sponsor of this program held each spring under the auspices of the president of Israel on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day.

Through its Center for Jewish Identity and its World Center-Jerusalem, B’nai B’rith is honored to work with Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust and its international committee.

As Israel marks a milestone anniversary in 2018, the designated theme was “70 Years of Remembering and Building: Holocaust Survivors and the State of Israel.”

“The annals of the Holocaust survivors who made aliyah to Israel are apparently unparalleled in the history of human migration,” said Avner Shalev, chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate. “From the

day they reached Israel, the survivors took on two simultaneous missions: shaping and preserving the memory of the Shoah on the one hand, and constructive social action on the other.”

The program seeks to educate the public about the Holocaust at a time when few survivors remain to tell the story firsthand. In his letter to the Jewish communities around the world, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin wrote, “By reading out names of our fellow Jews murdered in the Shoah, we can help give them back their human face, their place in our shared Jewish destiny.”

B’nai B’rith assists many communities and local organizers to incorporate the “Unto” ceremony into a variety of programs. In suburban Washington, D.C., B’nai B’rith participated in an event on April 8 at the Jewish Community



Photo courtesy of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington.

B’nai B’rith Chesapeake Bay Region President Jerold Jacobs with a reader taking part in the Unto Every Person There Is a Name ceremony, in Fairfax, Virginia, at the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia.

To read the full statements from Rivlin and Shalev, go to:

<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/2018/pdf/letters-reuven-rivlin-avner-shalev.pdf>

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Photo by Eric Berger, Courtesy of the St. Louis Jewish Light.

An “Unto Every Person There Is a Name” program was held at the St. Louis Holocaust Museum and Learning Center. Diane Maier (left) of the Jewish Community Center read names with students from a Jewish day school and a Christian school.



For their “We Walk to Remember” observances for Yom Hashoah, B’nai B’rith provides materials to Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi). The students distribute flyers and wear stickers that say “Never Forget” during the processions at colleges and universities.

Center of Northern Virginia. Barbara Brenman, past B’nai B’rith Chesapeake Bay region president, organized the name reading, which was led by current region president Jerold Jacobs. Also reading names were Ira Bartfield, chair of the B’nai B’rith Center for Jewish Identity; U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.); Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring; and many state legislators and representatives of other religions.

The program included a discussion of “hate speech and the Holocaust” for teens, an artwork display and an early evening memorial service honoring Holocaust victims and rescuers.

“Seeing the teenagers line up, eager to participate by reading names aloud is so heartening,” Bartfield said. “It is truly a time when l’dor va dor, passing our traditions and our story from generation to generation, is put into action in a way that is meaningful and will be long-lasting.”

In St. Louis, the B’nai B’rith event was held on April 24 in the lobby of the Jewish Federation building, in front of the St. Louis Holocaust Museum and Learning Center. The entire community was invited to participate in the name-reading ceremony. Survivors and their families joined in the reading. Students from Christ Community Lutheran School and the Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School also took part.

As they have for 29 years, volunteers from West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky gathered at B’nai Sholom Congregation in Huntington, West Virginia for the annual Holocaust remembrance ceremony and a worship service on April 15. Displays depicted the Nazi rise to power and their persecution of Jews and others. Between 3,000 and 4,000 names were read aloud during the all-day ceremony, according to a report in the St. Louis Herald-Dispatch.

As Rhonda Love, director of the B’nai B’rith International Center for Jewish Identity, notes, “For many on these lists of victims compiled by Yad Vashem, this is the only time their names will be said aloud as their entire family was murdered or there is no one left to remember them.”

At colleges and universities, B’nai B’rith works with Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi), a Jewish fraternity, to bring awareness about the Holocaust and remember the victims. The “Unto Every Person There Is a Name” program is now on 130 campuses in the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia. It is held in conjunction with AEPi’s “We Walk to Remember” observance for Yom Hashoah. B’nai B’rith provides informational flyers and stickers that say “Never Forget” that participants wear on black tee shirts during the processions.

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The program is promoted at AEPi winter conclaves and is included at the B'nai B'rith International outreach/information table at the annual AEPi convention in August. Links to stories published about events at the University of Central Florida, Kent State and the University of Pittsburgh provide an overview.

- **University of Central Florida:**
<http://knightnews.com/2018/04/ucf-fraternity-honors-holocaust-remembrance-day-with-silent-march/>
- **Kent State University:**
http://www.kentwired.com/latest_updates/article_3daf5cf6-3f1e-11e8-8a4f-13d462b2da5e.html
- **University of Pittsburgh:**
<https://pittnews.com/article/130741/news/pitt-honors-holocaust-victims-in-annual-remembrance-walk/>

News coverage of the ceremonies held in St. Louis and West Virginia and of some of the AEPi events cited the findings of a survey commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also known as the Claims Conference. Released on Yom Hashoah, the results show that

many Americans do not have an understanding of the facts of the Holocaust. This underscores how essential it is for such programs to continue.


For example, while 6 million Jews are estimated to have been killed in the Holocaust, 31 percent of all respondents and 41 percent of millennials, aged 18 to 34, believe that number is 2 million or less, according to the survey. Forty-five percent of all respondents could not name a concentration camp or ghetto from World War II. But a majority of Americans recognize that fewer people care about the Holocaust than in the past and believe that a genocide like the Holocaust could occur again.

To read the executive summary of the survey, visit:

<http://www.claimscon.org/study/>

The 30th anniversary of the “Unto Every Person There Is a Name” commemoration is scheduled for May 2, 2019.

To learn more about organizing a program in your community and downloading names to read aloud, visit:

<http://www.bnaibrith.org/unto-every-person.html> 



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