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Holocaust survivors' stories to live on through partnership

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Holocaust survivors gathered for an event at the Holocaust Documentation & Education Center in Dania Beach a few years ago. Testimonies of survivors that are part of the HDEC's collection will be integrated into the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive through a partnership. (Courtesy)

People from around the world will have the opportunity to access the Holocaust Documentation & Education Center's collection of more than 2,300 testimonies.

The HDEC in Dania Beach has formed a partnership with the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation. Through the partnership, the center's collection of Holocaust eyewitness testimonies will be integrated into USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.

Once preserved, the center's collection will be digitized, indexed, catalogued and made available for research and education through the foundation's worldwide network of VHA access points at more than 170 institutions used by more than 100,000 registered educators. The foundation has almost 30 years of experience in archiving and preserving testimony.

Rositta E. Kenigsberg, the center's president and chief executive officer, said, "We made a promise to Holocaust survivors in saying that no matter what, we will preserve their testimonies and we will make sure they will live on."

"With this extraordinary wonderful partnership, we are able to continue that commitment knowing that their stories will live on in perpetuity," Kenigsberg continued. "The Shoah Foundation certainly has the technology and the innovative knowledge. We are excited and ecstatic to be able to partner with them, and ensure the survivor legacy will live on for future generations to come. This was our number one priority on the onset when we started taking testimonies of survivors, liberators and rescuers."

Kori Street, Finci-Viterbi interim executive director of the foundation, explained the importance of adding the center's collection into its VHA.

"I think the testimony collection that they have is so important to be included in the overall Visual History Archive," Street said. "Every survivor story has something unique to tell, so adding these over 2,000 unique stories to the Visual History Archive with its 55,000 plus testimonies is something that we're giving back to the world."

Street continued, "Right now, not everyone has access to the collection in Florida."

“By putting them into the Visual History Archive, they are making these powerful stories accessible to researchers and educators globally to further what the survivors asked us to do, which was to use their voices to help the world be a better place, whether through education or through research.”

Street said the center’s collection of testimonies is among the largest the foundation has collected.

“I think they are the largest collection that an organization to this point has given,” she noted. “We’ve had some consortiums of a number of organizations coming together to add a single collection, but as a single organization, I do believe they are the largest that we will have in the Visual History Archive, other than our own.”

The center will also become a VHA full access site. This means that the entirety of the foundation’s more than 55,000 testimonies, along with the more than 2,300 to be integrated from the center’s collection, will be accessible at the HDEC in Dania Beach. The center will also be able to provide students, teachers, researchers, scholars, visitors, staff and volunteers with access to all the foundation’s content and associated tools.

The testimonies document life before, during, and after the Holocaust, and most were conducted in English, although there are often instances where the interviewees would revert to Yiddish, Polish, Spanish, or German.

Father Patrick O’Neill, chairman of the center’s board of directors, said, “The HDEC board of directors enthusiastically embraces this partnership as it represents an enormous step forward to ensuring that students and educators everywhere will have access to HDEC’s prestigious Oral History Library Collection.”

“Since 1980, the primary mission of the HDEC has been to document the authentic account of the Holocaust through recording the eyewitness testimonies of Survivors, their Liberators, Rescuers and others,” O’Neill

continued. “This exciting new partnership demonstrates the immeasurable significance of the HDEC Oral History Collection.”

Kenigsberg noted, “This incredible partnership opportunity for the HDEC was made possible by the extraordinary generosity of the Jim Moran Foundation for which all of us at the HDEC are tremendously grateful.”

“This gift, which funds the integration of the 2,300+HDEC eyewitness testimonies, will ensure that the HDEC Collection will be preserved and available throughout the world in perpetuity.”

Jan Moran, chairman and president of the Jim Moran Foundation, said, “Through our support of the Holocaust Documentation & Education Center’s preservation of historical testimonies, we have the privilege of being a part of this very special project that will encourage more understanding and respect for one another.”

“By giving voice to the survivors beyond their lifetimes, we honor the incredible strength and resiliency of the human spirit with a promise to never forget,” Moran continued.

Visit hdec.org for more information on the center, or sfi.usc.edu for the foundation.