

'It's about humanity'



An annual regional conference hosted by HERC discusses new ways educators could teach the history of the Holocaust to students. BYCZESTUDIO, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Barbara Goldstein is passionate about Holocaust education

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Recent studies have shown a nationwide deficit in education and consistency when it comes to learning about the Holocaust. As more survivors age and pass away, and with anti-Semitism on the rise, children of survivors have been getting more active in telling these vital stories.

As founder and president of the Holocaust Education Resource Council (HERC), Barbara Goldstein not only continues to share her parents' stories of surviving concentration camps and Jewish ghettos but has been able to create consistent education standards for Floridians statewide. "Holocaust education doesn't just teach about the Holocaust," says Goldstein. "We teach about civics, human rights and treating people with respect. Yes, six million Jews were killed, but it's about humanity. Everyone should be learning about how to not let it happen again to anybody."



Goldstein

Goldstein was recently appointed by the commissioner of education to be the chair of a task force on Holocaust education, which oversees the state's school districts. With Holocaust Education Week kicking off virtually on Nov. 9, she's proud of the strides the task force has been able to make in the past few months towards increasing programming in spite of the pandemic.

"There's been a lot of legislation regarding accountability and assessment for Holocaust education and we're creating new curriculum standards," says Goldstein. "We've gotten creative and pivoted to a virtual programming format. It's been successful because we're finding more people can attend from all over that would never have the opportunity to. That's been one of the silver linings."



A U.S. soldier greets liberated prisoners at Mauthausen concentration camp, May, 1945.

COLLECTION OF THE FLORIDA HOLOCAUST MUSEUM, COURTESY OF HELEN B. MICHELL

If you go

What: Holocaust Education Week

When: 6:30-8 p.m., Nov. 9, Nov. 10, Nov. 12

Where: Online

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information on how to register, please visit <https://www.holocaustresources.org/>.

Ten years ago, Goldstein transitioned from her job as a nutrition educator and created HERC. She realized the importance of not only increasing Holocaust education but helping give strategies to teachers who are tasked with it in their curriculum. During workshops, Goldstein equips these educators with more than facts and figures. She invites survivors and children of survivors to give testimonies and instructs teachers on how to make the work relevant for their students no matter the age or grade.

Last year at a workshop for 75 teachers, she invited many speakers to share how they took the

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guidelines and made lesson plans that worked for their students. What Goldstein remembers most from that intense and emotionally powerful day was the reflection of one teacher who candidly shared her thoughts with the group.

“She stood up thanked us for doing this because before that day she wasn’t going to teach [the Holocaust],” says Goldstein. “She said she didn’t understand how important it was and was uncomfortable, but now couldn’t wait to go back to her classroom and teach it the next day. We give teachers the tools and toolbox and strike that chord that opens a door.”

Goldstein and her team have compiled a resource guide that coincides with Holocaust Education week. She often returns to films like “Schindler’s List” and survivor testimonies when thinking of how to open up conversations in the classroom and beyond.

The three presenters she invited for this year’s programming will give talks on Zoom, starting with Dr. Mark Wygoda on Monday, Nov. 9. Co-hosted by the Florida Holocaust Museum, Dr. Wygoda will speak about his father’s experiences surviving in a camp which were recounted in his father’s book “In the Shadow of the Swastika.”

Keeping with the literary theme on Nov. 12, Dr. Robert Watson will share excerpts his book “The Nazi Titanic: The Incredible Untold Story of a Doomed Ship in World War II.” Dr. Oren Baruch Stier, professor of religious studies and director of Florida International University’s Holocaust and genocide studies program, will also lead a talk on Nov. 11.

“That night is about Kristallnacht which is the beginning of the end and the end of the beginning,” says Goldstein, referring to “The Night of Broken Glass” when German citizens destroyed Jewish businesses and synagogues. “It was a marking point at the start of the Holocaust when this violence occurred.”

Goldstein recognizes how literature and the arts play a key role in relaying these stories that can seem faraway when looked at through the lens of history. She’s seen fifth grade classes write and illustrate poetry after reading and hearing firsthand accounts from Jewish survivors, or, like in the case of Anne Frank, had their stories survive. Goldstein tells many students to start a journal like Frank did, emphasizing that you never know where your story might end up.

She remembers one such former student walking into her office one day beaming with pride as he recounted winning HERC’s art and essay contest years before. Three years ago, the organization held a concert of Holocaust music that shared famous musicians’ compositions who were imprisoned in the camps. It is these moments and events that reaffirm for Goldstein the importance of HERC’s work.

“They were not just fighting back with guns, they were playing music every day to save their minds,” says Goldstein. “That was the human spirit. Those are the beautiful things I share with the students and the teachers and I walk away feeling rewarded because I feel they’ve learned something more than the dates. Dates don’t mean that much unless you talk about a real story. The real story can be powerful and something to learn from.”

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).