

Will history repeat itself?

Belleville News

The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies is hoping they can "empower people to raise their voices and take action against hate to make the world a better place."

To fulfill that purpose, the Wiesenthal Centre (FSWC) invested in an innovative mobile "Tolerance Education Centre," a multi-media theatre on wheels, able to bring educational programs to schools and communities beyond Toronto.

The Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board has included the program as part of their history course. The big white tour bus boldly displays the title, Tour for Humanity, with large faces from diverse cultures emblazoned on the sides, a vehicle meant to draw attention, seating 30 people a showing. The tour has been to Loyalist and Quinte secondary schools since it took to the road in 2013, and presented to community leaders, educators, and front-line workers on topics of diversity, democracy, responsibility and Canadian civic rights.

Wednesday, May 13, it arrived at Centre Hastings Secondary School where class groups of Grade 11 and 12 students took turns viewing the 45-minute presentation facilitated by Laura Dantsis of the FSWC, and Sherri Browning, department head for Canadian and World Studies at CHSS.

Browning says CHSS has a strong connection with the centre.

"Four years ago we partnered with FSWC. We can take courses and made a visit to the Toronto centre." Browning says she took an intensive two-day program at the Los Angeles centre.

Students are scheduled to attend the Toronto centre again September 23, Freedom Day, when they will hear Wab Kinew, aboriginal rights activist, rapper, media star and panelist for CBC's Canada Reads choice awards.

Gold medal hockey winner Meaghan Mikkelson, and Travis Price, co-founder of Pink Shirt Day (anti-hate movement) will also speak from their perspectives.

The program, Dantsis explained, began through benefactors in support of Simon Wiesenthal's movement to educate

about the slaughter of 11 million people under Hitler's Nazi regime, six million of those killed were Jews. Wiesenthal was a survivor of the concentration camps.

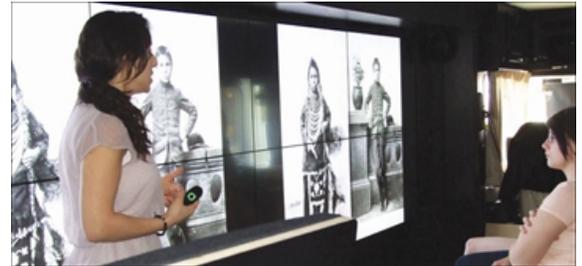
"Though the centre was started to educate people on the realities of the Holocaust, there are many cases of mass slaughter and cultural genocide. Most people don't know Canada played a part. It's not often given attention."

Scheduled for the day was "The Canadian Experience," a slide show focusing on historical events, such as the history of Aboriginal Residential schools and treatment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. It also addresses the timely topic of cyber-bullying.

Students sat quietly during the presentation, listening to sordid, historic, details of decisions made by Fathers of Confederation, commercial developers, war departments, religious factions and governing bodies across Canada. Response to questions was made gingerly on the sensitive topic. It was a time for reflection.

Students across Canada, in Grades 11 and 12, may apply for an educational scholarship from FSWC designed to recognize those "who have demonstrated strong commitment to further Wiesenthal's legacy of promoting tolerance, social justice and human rights."

For further information contact FSWC at www.fswc.ca (<http://www.fswc.ca>) or phone 416-864-9735.



(Above and right) FSWC tour facilitator Laura Dantsis explained Canada is not exempt from crimes against humanity, making reference to First Nations and Japanese Canadians throughout history, the fight for gay rights and the current trend of cyber-bullying.



Laura Dantsis introduced CHSS students to the history of Simon Wiesenthal, and the establishment of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre which now provides a mobile education centre for schools and communities outside the GTA.

