

Meet Jack Rosenbaum, CEO of HEAL

By Linda Chase
Contributing Editor

I recently met Jack Rosenbaum, CEO of HEAL (Holocaust Education, Advocacy Leaders Inc.) and he invited me to observe the students at Omni Middle School in Boca Raton during one of the HEAL presentations.

Jack explained why he created HEAL. “As the Holocaust survivor population dwindles, I realized that students from all walks of life need to meet Holocaust survivors before they are gone. I envisioned such students offering Holocaust education advocacy programs to their schools. As a small non-profit start up, we have more than doubled the amount of students that have expanded their Holocaust knowledge and who have paid it forward at their schools to their peers.”

With antisemitism and Holocaust denial dangerously on the rise, Jack expressed why the development of HEAL is so vital.

“The more that teenagers are able to understand the Holocaust as one of the most horrible events in human history, the better off humanity will be. So far, the teens who have been nominated from more than 16 local schools have become empowered and are offering original Holocaust programs to their peers. As they achieve adulthood, they will continue to be positive influencers to make our world a more accepting place.”

Jack discussed the Holocaust Education series he recently presented at Temple Shaarei Shalom in Boynton Beach.

“Teens at the temple participated in a 6 hour Holocaust mini course. They followed the rise of the Nazis and reasons why the Holocaust happened. They met with and listened to the testimony from Holocaust survivor Sam Ron, 98, who shared his labor camp and ghetto experiences with them. The course was well received at Shaarei Shalom. If other synagogues, churches and religious organizations would like to have a HEAL mini course, we are always ready to design a program with them.”

Jack shared his thoughts on the future of Holocaust education as the responsibility falls on younger generations to educate others.

“As we will no longer have eye-witnesses in the near future, the Holocaust could become just another historical event. The more we empower teens to have a strong basis of accurate history and impart meaningful lessons, the better off our world will be. I believe that the current methods of teacher training of the Holocaust and other difficult topics require additional follow-up. This could be a priority for the wonderful training offered by



Holocaust survivor Zelda Fuksman presents her testimony to students at Omni Middle School in Boca Raton as part of the HEAL (Holocaust Education Advocacy Leaders Inc.) program. **PHOTO BY LINDA CHASE**

the PBC public schools, FAU, FIU, and the Holocaust Memorial in Miami Beach. After the initial training workshops take place, professional mentors for teachers would be beneficial for those who teach difficult topics, such as Shoah and Genocide. Veteran teachers can benefit as well. 2Gs-4Gs, the offspring of survivors, must continue stepping up to share the Holocaust legacies of their families to students. Survivors of recent genocides (mostly) do not offer testimony. They are still reeling from their horrific experiences and are at the same stages as Holocaust survivors were from 1945 to the '80s and '90s. A survivor never forgets!”

Jack recalled being inspired by a story told by Simon Wiesenthal.

“When I was 15, I found his book in a classroom at my yeshiva high school titled ‘The Murderers Among Us’. It had a red swastika on the cover. A five page description titled ‘Two Candles’ of how Mr. Wiesenthal brought a Nazi criminal named

Wilhelm Rosenbaum to justice caught my eye as I thumbed through it. Seeing his last name was the same as mine compelled me to read that story on the spot. It altered my life-path. My parents were born in the USA and I had no direct connection to the Shoah. Most of my high school friends did. It opened my eyes to what my yeshiva did not share with us in the late sixties due to many students who had survivor-parents; the wounds of most of their parents were still too raw, so we knew little then.”

Jack reflected on his involvement with Student Awareness Days (SAD) in Palm Beach County.

“In the 1990s and early 2000s I was the assistant director at the now defunct Jewish Education Commission (JEC) in south Palm Beach County. We worked with the Holocaust Documentation Center in Dania Beach, FAU and Eileen Shapiro was the first Holocaust programmer for the Palm Beach County public schools. Emulating the wonderful model which

is still being presented by the Holocaust Documentation Center, we offered SAD programs with these entities in PBC. We learned that when teenagers sit with Holocaust survivors and listen to their eye-witness testimonies, they become witnesses, according to the great Elie Wiesel. When students meet survivors in person, they develop a powerful bond. Listening to survivors becomes a living history which is unparalleled.”

Jack shared his thoughts regarding the March of the Living.

“The March of the Living is a Jewish Identity program that teaches the Holocaust and the connections to the State of Israel. It was designed for Jewish students. In my 25 years with the program, I always believed that we needed an equal program for non-Jewish students. Locally, such endeavors were tried a few times with great success and once by the JEC in 1999. Student Awareness Days are powerful. The HEAL program is powerful.”