

Holocaust Center will Expand Thanks to a Grant from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund

■ Educational outreach will explore the effects of prejudice.

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

~ Elie Wiesel, holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate

By Brent Merrill

Native Americans understand pain and suffering. And, although some Tribes now enjoy prosperity and peace and joy — they will never forget how they got there.

Jewish Americans understand pain and suffering. And, although many Jewish communities now enjoy prosperity, peace and joy — they will also never forget how they got there.

Today, Tribes like the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon are not only looking to help themselves, but they are finding ways to help the surrounding community and a variety of deserving organizations. One of the latest organizations to receive a boost from the Grand Ronde Tribe through its Spirit Mountain Community Fund is the Oregon Holocaust Resource Center at Pacific University in Forest Grove.

The Center recently received a \$50,000 grant from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund to expand the knowledge of Oregon teachers who educate students on the holocaust.

The Center provides educational outreach that explores the effects of prejudice, the meaning of tolerance and the importance of celebrating humanity. The grant will allow the Center to conduct more workshops and seminars intended to better inform middle school and high school teachers.

"It is really important for us to promote diversity and tolerance for all groups. That is one of the reasons that I think this was a real interest-

ing grant," said Fund Administrator and Grand Ronde Tribal member Angie Ellis.

"As an educator, I used to teach for Head Start. What was really important to me when I taught Head Start was to represent people's cultural differences in an authentic way that was also not stereotypical," said Ellis. "When I taught preschool children, it was real important for me to educate the little kids and start building those images in their mind and start erasing some of those stereotypes that they are so often subjected to through television and the media.

"That is what I like about this grant. It is increasing teacher training so they can provide an accurate portrayal of what happened then," said Ellis. "I think it is very important for people to want the truth about what happened and not the perspective of the oppressor.

"Personally, I think this is a really good example of what this fund is set up to do which is help organizations like this to have a long-lasting impact in the State of Oregon," said Ellis.

The Center's Program Director, Dr. Geri Senft, has a personal as well as professional connection to the Holocaust Center. She has been the program director since November of last year, but she started as an unpaid volunteer. Her reasons go deep.

"Both of my parents went through and survived concentration camps during the holocaust," explained Senft. "I started volunteering for this organization as a way to give back and do what I can.

"I know that in our Teacher Education program we emphasize a lot

of teacher and student education and community education through this organization," said Senft. "We really want to emphasize not just teaching the holocaust as a historical event that happened, but to demonstrate the relevance in today's world. And not just to the Jewish population, but to show commonality between other groups that experienced similar events.

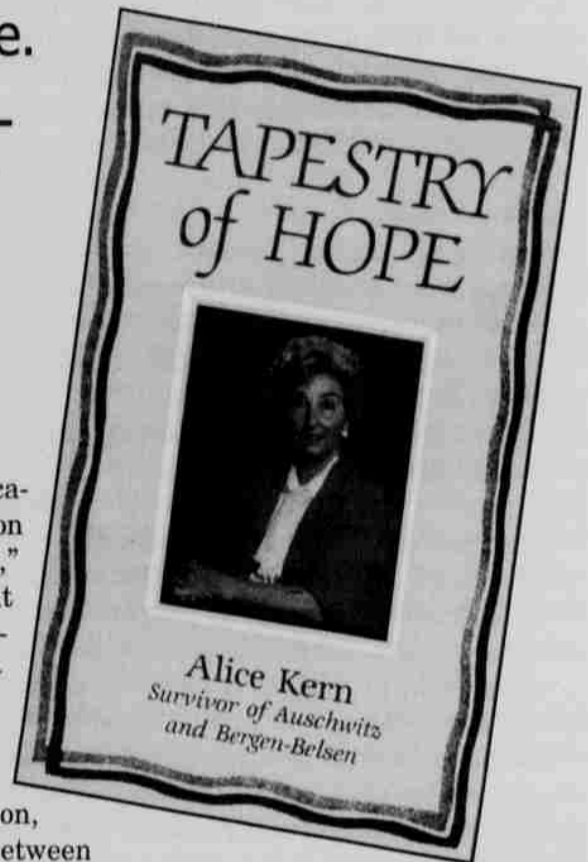
"From a personal standpoint, I'm what they call a second-generation holocaust survivor," said Senft of her family. "From my own perspective, I know that it gives no greater sense of satisfaction to my parents, who are survivors, knowing we are now training future generations. We are teaching them so that the holocaust isn't forgotten. The lessons need to be taken forward and applied and made relevant to a student's own life."

Senft's mother Alice Kern is part of the Center's speaker's bureau and regularly talks to groups of students about surviving the holocaust. She seems to make a connection to young people when she talks about how normal her life was before the Nazi invasion into her hometown of Sighet, Romania.

"When we talk about how my mom was just enjoying her life and taking piano lessons and going swimming in the public pools and riding her bike and how those rights were one-by-one taken away, kids can relate to that because they ride their bike," said Senft of her mother's story. "We try to teach these common shared experiences and how to recognize when there is a group that's being discriminated against. And, to speak out against that."

Alice Kern, 77, survived both Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland and later Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany.

"Those people who were interned in Auschwitz near the end of the war as the Russian front was approaching, the Nazis wanted to eliminate any evidence of having prisoners and so those that could still walk, were forced to leave Auschwitz and walk on what they called the death



This striking photo of holocaust survivor Alice Kern is on the cover of her book about surviving two Nazi death camps. The photo shows a number tattoo on Kern's arm that is a constant reminder of her time in captivity.

Kern's daughter, Dr. Geri Senft, is the director of the Oregon Holocaust Resource Center.

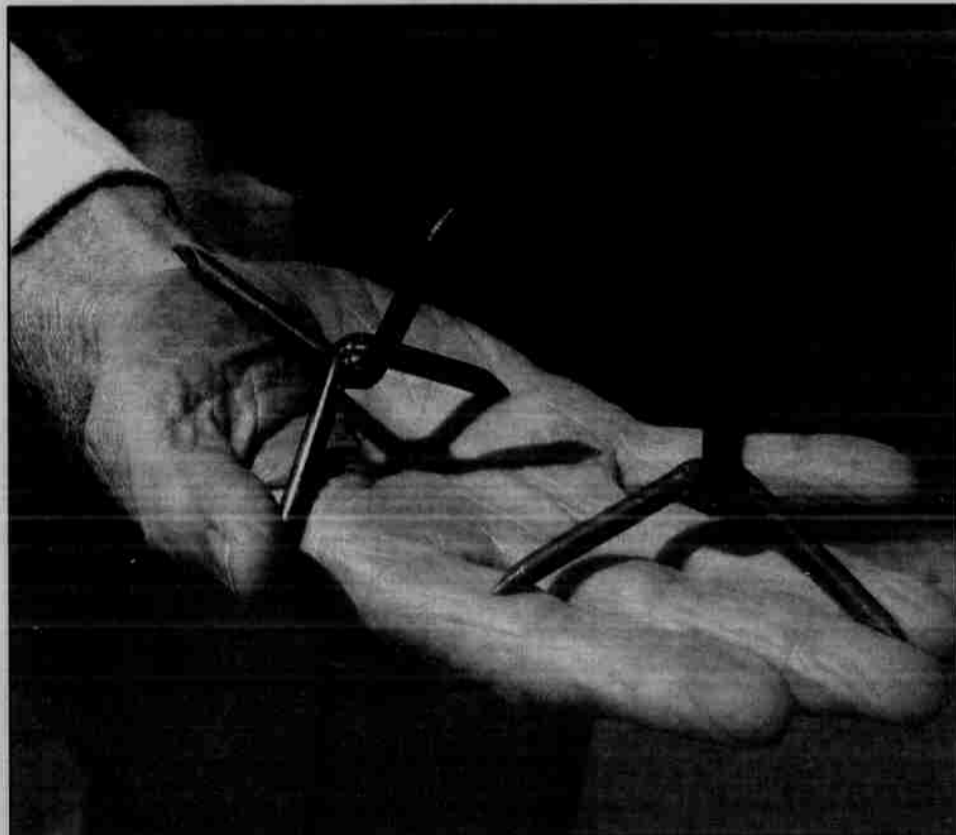
The Center recently received a \$50,000 grant from the Grand Ronde Tribe's Spirit Mountain Community Fund to expand their Teacher Education program.

As part of the Tribe's gaming agreement with the State of Oregon, six percent of casino profits are shared with deserving, non-profit organizations throughout the state.

march," said Senft. "They (the Nazis) walked them from Poland into Germany. And then, via cattle cars again to another concentration camp. Many of them were taken to Bergen-Belsen in Germany where she was."

Senft's father, who just turned 91, also survived a Nazi concentration camp in Germany. Hugo Kern survived Dachau concentration camp by showing papers he had proving he had worked outside the country before his internment. Hugo grew up in an area outside of Vienna, Austria.

"The fear, hate and tolerance for the injustice that allowed Nazi Germany to flourish are the same building blocks that help explain today's atrocities in Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda, as well as recent bias crimes in the Pacific Northwest. We want to help young people understand how to make moral decisions," said Senft of the Center's mission.



Nazi resistance fighter Gus Smoorenburg, who lives in Sheridan, holds two metal spikes used to blow out the tires of Nazi trucks during World War II. Smoorenburg, from Holland, led several covert operations against the Nazis as a young soldier.



The Oregon Holocaust Resource Center provides a speaker's bureau of holocaust survivors, collects oral histories of survivors who have settled in Oregon, offers an extensive library of books, videos, curriculum aids and other materials for teachers.

You can reach the Center by calling (503) 359-2930.