

# Making much of a horrid microcosm

By Eric Goldscheider

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**SPRINGFIELD** — On the campus of the Springfield Jewish Community Center is a small museum with a grand ambition.

## Detours

A curved wall of glass panels that spiral to a peak welcomes visitors to the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center, one of the newest museums in the state. Under the auspices of the Jewish Federation of Greater Springfield, it opened in October 2004.

The center's permanent exhibit is called "A Reason to Remember." Through artifacts, photographs, oral histories, original documents, and historical context, it chronicles the fates of five Jewish families in the village of Roth, Germany, from 1933 to 1942.

"What happened in this village is a microcosm of what happened everywhere," said Rabbi Robert Sternberg, the museum's executive director. "More or less the whole history is explained within this story."

The narrative shows the incremental marginalization of Jews under the Nazi regime that eventually led to the deaths of millions in what the exhibit terms "the machinery of destruction." Fifteen of the 31 Jews in prewar Roth, then a village of about 500 residents south of Marburg, in west central Germany, were murdered. Others escaped, some to the United States.

Not surprisingly, there is a story behind the story of how this exhibit came into being. In 1998, Deborah Roth-Howe of Amherst

## If you go . . .

### Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center

1160 Dickinson St., Springfield  
413-734-7700

[www.hatikvah-center.org](http://www.hatikvah-center.org)

Monday-Thursday 9 a.m.-4 p.m.,  
Friday 9-2, Sunday 10-4. Adults  
\$4, seniors \$3, students \$2.

**Directions:** About 90 miles or two hours from Boston. Take the Mass. Turnpike (Interstate 90) west to I-91 south. Take exit 1 (Longmeadow/Route 5 south) and at the second traffic light, turn left on Converse Street. The Jewish Community Center Campus parking lot is 1.2 miles ahead on the left.

and her father, Herbert Roth, who had left the village as a teenager, traveled to Germany. They discovered that the small synagogue in Roth had not been destroyed, largely because it abutted another structure and the owner prevailed on the Nazis to spare the building.

More than 50 years later, a government-financed project was underway to restore the synagogue. At the same time, some high school teachers had discovered in an obscure archive a trove of artifacts and documents belonging to the families who had perished in the Holocaust. Together with their students, the teachers put together a display that became the basis for the Springfield exhibit.

Sternberg, who previously directed the St. Louis Holocaust Mu-



STEPHEN ROSEFOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sydney Levin-Epstein, 11, left, and Madison Zeller, 10, listen to survivors' testimony at the Hatikvah Center in Springfield.

seum and Learning Center, realized upon coming to the Hatikvah Center (Hatikvah means "the hope" in Hebrew) that he needed to create a permanent installation to anchor the center's educational activities.

The convergence of these events led to what is the only Holocaust museum with a big exhibition in New England, and which last year received 5,000 visitors. A similar museum is planned for Augusta, Maine.

The Hatikvah Center also has a library with a reading room and display panels depicting stories from other survivors with family members who settled in the greater Springfield area.

Sternberg said he doesn't see the museum as a Jewish institu-

tion, but rather as a place for interfaith reflection on what can happen when otherwise good people turn a blind eye to injustice. Part of the exhibit depicts the persecution of African-Americans in the United States, and artifacts associated with the Ku Klux Klan are to be added.

"We must understand that the choices we make responding to injustice in the world have profound consequences," said Sternberg. "If you're not engaged in actively reflecting on these things, the potential is always there for them to happen again some day."

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