

200 gather at museum to recognize Holocaust Day

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Richmond Times-Dispatch

"We are gathered here today for this awesome and awful commemoration," Rabbi Dovid Asher said to a crowd of about 200 bowed heads at the Virginia Holocaust Museum's Yom HaShoah ceremony.

Yom HaShoah is the annual Day of Remembrance to honor the memory of millions of Jewish Holocaust victims.

Sunday's ceremony was led by Samuel Asher, president and executive director of the Virginia Holocaust Museum.

"In today's atmosphere, political, cultural, ideological and racial divisions here in America mean the mission of the Virginia Holocaust Museum has never been more relevant and vital in our society," Asher said after honoring friends of the museum who have died this year.

The museum's mission is to preserve and document the history of the Holocaust and other genocides in order to educate and inspire future generations of Virginians to fight prejudice and all forms of indifference.

"Everyone who visits the Holocaust Museum will learn about the horrors of the Holocaust so that it may never happen again," Samuel Asher said. "Yet we learn of the barbaric acts of Hamas perpetrated on Israelis on October 7 and now there are protests erupting on college campuses across America. We can't help but fear in the deepest crevices of our soul."

Pro-Palestine protesters and police clashed last Monday evening after officers tried to clear a makeshift encampment on the lawn outside the James Branch Cabell Library on Virginia Commonwealth University's Monroe Park campus. The protesters were pitching tents in what they called a "liberation zone" and demanding an immediate end to Israel's offensive in Gaza; 13 people were arrested.

On Sunday, Beth Ahabah performed the chanting of the El Maleh Rachamim and the Mourner's Kaddish during the ceremony before the keynote



NICOLAS GALINDO PHOTOS, TIMES-DISPATCH

Samuel Asher, president and executive director of the Virginia Holocaust Museum, speaks during the Yom HaShoah ceremony at the museum in Richmond on Sunday.



People gather at the end of the Yom HaShoah ceremony at the Virginia Holocaust Museum on Sunday to view the Tolerance and Justice winning pieces in the Visual Arts Contest.

address by Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat, chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

Carole Weinstein awarded the winners of the Prize for Tolerance and Justice in the Visual Arts. The contest theme was "Never Again."

Six Holocaust memorial candles were lit during the ceremony by survivor families from the Richmond region. The six candles signify the 6 million Jewish people who perished in the Holocaust. One of the candles is shorter than the others to repre-

sent the 1.5 million children who were killed.

Roger Loria, 84, lit the second candle.

"They declared me a deserter at 3 years old because I escaped deportation," Loria said.

During the Holocaust, the entire paternal side of Loria's family died. Loria and his mother evaded capture while moving from town to town across central Europe before finding a haven in a Swiss refugee camp in 1944.

"It was hate," he said. "It's important that people know that. It is extremely important that



Gabriel Laufer, a second-generation survivor of the Holocaust, lights a candle during the Yom HaShoah ceremony on Sunday.



Winners of the Visual Arts Contest pose for a group portrait at the Virginia Holocaust Museum on Sunday.

people know the history and the truth so they do not repeat it because of ignorance?"

The museum's Yom HaShoah ceremony offered a peaceful space for reflection on the past, but attendees were not dismissive about their fears for today. Both Samuel Asher and Eizenstat spoke on the uptick in security presence among the Jewish community.

"When I came here, every survivor that survived the war, their biggest desire was to come to America, but it's changing now. For me to see that really hurts me a lot," said Halina Zimm, a

Holocaust survivor. "I never believed this would happen in this country."

Zimm, 95, came to the U.S. when she was 21. She is grateful for the chance to tell her and her family's story.

"I was the lucky one. My mother, my father, tremendous family; they all died. I speak for them because they cannot speak for themselves," Zimm said. "So I guess God wants me to be here, so I can tell the story."

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