

Tour for Humanity begins journey in Oakville

Tour brings education home

Oakville Beaver

The Tour for Humanity's journey to educate and inspire others has begun, after launching in Oakville earlier this month.

Created by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC), the Tour for Humanity is a fully-equipped and accessible mobile education centre that addresses issues of human rights and social justice.

The unit will bring human rights programming to schools and communities across Ontario. Its goal is to inspire participants to take action against hatred and intolerance.

FSWC members joined Halton police and Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr for a ribbon-cutting at the Halton Regional Centre.

"For many years, the Halton Regional Police Service has enjoyed a warm and positive partnership and friendship with the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center. (Its) training sessions and people are invaluable for our members and for the policing profession," said Halton Police Chief Stephen Tanner. "(It) offers education and a safe place to ask questions and share sometimes challenging discussions."

Tour for Humanity will give people an opportunity to connect with Ontario communities, Tanner said, and offer the same "insights and education" Halton police share.

FSWC president and CEO Avi Benlolo said his group wanted to go mobile to reach communities with limited or no access to its education.

"We came up with the idea five years ago. We wanted to go out of the GTA and into (other) communities and give exposure to the story of the Holocaust, racism and intolerance," said Benlolo.

He noted support from Tanner and the local community inspired the FSWC.

"I think it will pay dividends for everybody in policing, education and the community. Everybody will reap the rewards," said Benlolo.

The mobile classroom will offer a choice of two visual presentations.

The first focuses on Canadian events such as the history of Aboriginal residential schools and the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

The second choice, available in early 2014, is a film focusing on three key areas — the Holocaust, genocide and historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Helen Keller, Simon Wiesenthal and Gandhi.

Each session is approximately 45 minutes long and can accommodate one group, up to 30 people, at a time.

"We want to give people exposure to the important history Canadians have been involved with. By learning about these violent atrocities, they can inspire others to do good in the community they live in," said Benlolo.

Fred Leitner is a Tour for Humanity donor and a FSWC board member. His parents are Holocaust survivors. Leitner's mother lost her parents, five brothers and sisters and other relatives in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

"To say that my parents were traumatized by this event would be a gross understatement. Their only crime was that they were Jews. My mother never overcame the guilt of having survived," said Leitner.

Carr said Canada has the highest standard of living with "one of the largest diverse populations."

"We have built the most prosperous and safest communities in the world, but we can't take that for granted. It's because of the work we do, but centres like (FSWC) continually help us get better and better," said Carr.

Benlolo noted the mobile centre is currently in a trial phase and will begin "rolling out hard" to schools and communities across Ontario in six to 12 months.



From left, Halton Regional Police Chief Stephen Tanner, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies President and CEO Avi Benlolo, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies Board of Governors Member and donor Fred Leitner and Regional Chair Gary Carr during the launch of the tour for Humanity in the Region of Halton.

“We’re giving it as much exposure as possible. Once it rolls out, it will hopefully go from one community to the next and we will then have it scheduled,” said Benlolo. “We hope that every student and community member that comes on this bus, or even sees it driving down the street, will be inspired to do something good in their community.”

The bus requires a designated parking area of 20-feet-by-50-feet to allow people to get on and off safely.

To book the Tour for Humanity, contact tourforhumanity@fswc.ca (mailto:tourforhumanity@fswc.ca) or Sara Mikail at 416-847-2275. For information, visit www.fswc.ca (<http://www.fswc.ca>).