

Coast to Coast

Winnipeg students visit U.S. Holocaust museum

By MYRON LOVE
Prairies Correspondent

WINNIPEG — For Tali Braunstein, seeing the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., was a tremendous learning experience.

"I learned a lot of things about the Holocaust I didn't know before," she said. "I learned a lot about propaganda and what really happened, and I also learned about the good people who helped save Jews."

The Winnipegger was among a group of 25 Grade 9 students from her school, out of a total of 106 public school students from Manitoba, who participated in the Asper Foundation Holocaust and Human Rights Studies Program and trip to Washington from May 11 to 14. Another 300 students from 13 cities in 8 provinces went on the same trip earlier this spring.

As far as Holocaust survivor and educator Barbara Goszer is concerned, the Holocaust program "is the best thing the foundation has come up with."

She accompanied the students to Washington. "It was a magnificent experience," said Goszer, who worked with the students for several weeks before the trip.

"The kids were exhilarated and stimulated. It was nice that some of them came up to me while we were touring the museum to ask if I was OK."

The visit to the Holocaust museum was just one part of the Washington experience. The group also visited other key sites and museums, including the Smithsonian Institute and Mount Vernon, George Washington's estate.

The objectives of the Asper Foundation's Holocaust and Human Rights Studies Program are to promote tolerance and sensitize Canadian high school students to the consequences of racism through a specially designed education program, said senior program manager Jeff Morry.

The program was started six years ago in

Winnipeg with Grade 8 students from Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate, the city's Jewish high school.

It was subsequently expanded to Jewish Grade 9 students in the city's public schools and is now a national initiative. Almost 30 per cent of program participants are non-Jewish.

All participants take an 18-hour education program on the Holocaust and human rights, with an emphasis on American history and the civil rights movement, Morry said.

The educational component of the program was developed for the Asper Foundation by Holocaust and human rights educators.

After completing the educational component, students head to Washington, D.C., where they spend several days touring the Holocaust museum and other monuments to freedom.

The students are also required to volunteer in their communities on public projects of their choice when they return. The majority of the trip's cost are borne by the Asper Foundation.

In the past six years, almost 1,500 students from a variety of religious backgrounds and more than 30 communities across Canada have participated.

The Asper Foundation was established in Winnipeg in 1983 to further the philanthropic objectives of Israel Asper and the Asper family.

Morry said the Asper Foundation is working on a number of significant initiatives, most notably the recent announcement of plans to build a \$200 million, 21-storey Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, slated to open in 2007. In addition to the museum's focus on human rights, plans call for it to incorporate the largest Holocaust gallery in Canada.

The Asper Foundation's Holocaust and Human Rights Studies Program will be expanded in coming years to sponsor visits to the museum by 100,000 Canadian high school students each year, Morry said.

