

AZ State Judges Learn "Lessons of the Holocaust"

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Sheila Polk examines the "Fighting the Fires of Hate" exhibit at Yavapai Community College. This exhibit was brought to Prescott by the USHMM. Photo by Tracey Horn.

It was March, 2006, when Yavapai County Attorney Sheila Polk was part of a group of delegates from the Prescott area community that traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's (USHMM) community program, "Law Enforcement and Society: The Lessons of the Holocaust."

The trip was sponsored by the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott (JCFGP), and was part of a pilot program for the USHMM, meaning that the greater Prescott area was the first small community in the United States to bring law enforcement leaders to experience the interactive program emphasizing ethical leadership in law enforcement.

Polk felt a profound impact from what she saw and heard, telling the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott Legacy newsletter, "It was invaluable. The program is a wonderful vehicle for teaching, one that can be used across the board - for prosecutors and judges as well, because we're all a part of the system. This program is incredibly powerful."

As a matter of fact, Polk felt the program was so important, that she decided to help bring the program to Arizona. In a speech at the Foundation's 10th Anniversary Luncheon, Polk explains, "Within 18 months of my introduction to the program, the Holocaust Museum presented the Lessons of the Holocaust to eleven of the fifteen elected Arizona County Attorneys, two City Prosecutors and representatives of the Arizona Supreme Court and the Arizona Attorney General's Office. Even if the ripple effect had ended there, the Foundation's impact from the initial investment in educating and impacting the leaders of most of Arizona's felony prosecuting offices would be significant. The ripple effect, however, continues."

Who Else Went?

Prescott-area community leaders who went to Washington included:

- * Former Prescott Mayor Rowle Simmons
- * Prescott Police Chief Randy Oaks
- * Prescott Valley Mayor Harvey Skoog
- * Former Prescott Valley Police Chief Daniel Schatz
- * County Supervisor Carol Springer
- * County Sheriff Steve Waugh
- * Superior Court Judge Robert Brutinel
- * Kenton Jones, local attorney
- * Yavapai Community College President James F. Horton, Jr.
- * Ron Fain , local business leader
- * Tracey Horn , local business leader

"Last summer," Polk said, "the Museum came back to Arizona again, this time to train 120 of our deputy prosecutors from offices across the state. Because of the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the class participants, we have now entered into talks with nation's premier training center for both state and federal prosecutors nationwide, the National Advocacy Center, located in South Carolina. I have no doubt that within one year, we will see the Lessons of the Holocaust as part of the standard curriculum at the NAC, thanks to the initial investment by our local Jewish Community Foundation."

But, the 'ripple effects' that Polk spoke of continue even further. This week, all 800 Arizona state judges - from simple magistrates to Arizona Supreme Court Judges - will be in Tucson to participate in the Holocaust Ethical Leadership course, jointly developed by Polk and the Holocaust Museum. Polk will be giving the introduction of the course to the Arizona judges.

According to Dr. David Hess, President of the JCFGP, "It is a first time event that each and every judge of a state will be exposed to this type of Ethical Leadership course that is based solely on the Lessons of the Holocaust."

Polk speaks from her heart when she says, "Out of the unspeakable evil of the Holocaust comes a purpose. The Lessons serve not only to preserve the memory of the Holocaust for generations to come but actively work to ensure that such evil never occurs in this country."