

WMU Hillel: Kicked To The Street?

Kalamazoo

Jews in Kalamazoo? Couldn't be, but it's true and soon the Western Michigan University Hillel will find itself with no place to call home. WMU Hillel has had an apartment off campus that will no longer exist as of this fall. There is reason to be concerned because the Jewish students at WMU are growing in numbers and leadership strength.

The Good

Western Michigan University over the past decade has seen an increase of Jewish students enroll at the university, many hailing from Metro Detroit. In the 1990s, there were a couple hundred Jewish students on campus. Today, the Jewish student community is approaching 1,000. With this developing Jewish community on campus, Hillel at WMU has seen an increase in involvement that is unprecedented.

This past semester, Shabbat dinners attracted so many students that the Hillel apartment quickly filled, leaving standing-room-only, with more than 35 students in attendance. Hillel has become a place to see old friends and make new ones. It's about creating a community for Jewish students all their own — like a home away from home.

"I did not know what to expect, but it felt

very familiar," said Amit Harris, a sophomore next fall. "Through Hillel, I have gained a lot of Jewish friends and a sense of involvement on campus, too."

Hillel's activity is broad. This past year, WMU Hillel brought the documentary film *Paper Clips* to campus. We hosted two screenings of the film and attracted more than 100 students and community members to the event.

Hillel is represented in the Western Student Association. And we participated in the International Festival, serving Israeli food to thousands of attendees. We also collaborated with other student organizations to bring to campus OneVoice, an organization that works to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This excitement has passed down to the incoming students. During the month of June, Hillel set up a booth during freshman orientation and signed up dozens of new students who want to be part of Hillel in the fall.

With the momentum rolling this winter, we plan to send the first group of Western Michigan University students on a Birthright trip to Israel. This means not only will the individuals experience the opportunity of a lifetime, but they also will



Jay Pliskow
Community
View

do it together with people they will be in class with when they return. We can only imagine what kind of further growth in the community this will develop.

The Bad

This is all very exciting for WMU Hillel and we expect to continue to grow. However, this growth could quickly be stunted without a place to call home.

With no permanent meeting place, we will resort to wandering around campus from meeting room to meeting room. We fear the loss of comfort and the limitations it presents.

The apartment became a comfortable place that Jewish students could come to and be welcomed to for the past three years. Unfortunately, the property management has changed, is renovating the apartment, terminating our agreement and increasing the rent four times the previous rate. Hillel has a limited budget and simply cannot afford the higher rent.

This leaves us with no place to go! No place to store supplies, no place to plan events and no more hanging out on Friday night for hours at Hillel, then returning the next day to enjoy the cholent prepared the afternoon before.

The Hopeful

The loss of this home could turn into the something better and we need the greater community to help make this happen. I am making the call to the Jewish community in Michigan and beyond that the Western Michigan University Hillel needs a place to call home and we need you to make it happen.

This is the time to make it happen! The students are ready for it and have shown it though their leadership. The community needs it. WMU students are more likely to stay in Michigan after graduation when compared to our counterparts at other universities. They will, in turn carry on our Jewish traditions as they take root in Michigan to start their new careers and families.

If you or someone you know would like to help create a new home for the WMU Hillel, please contact us through e-mail at kazoohillel@yahoo.com or visit our Web site at www.wmuhillel.com to learn more about our organization. □

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My Experience At Bad Arolsen

East Lansing

I was among 15 scholars from around the world who were sponsored by the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and who gathered at the Red Cross International Tracing Services (ITS) archive in Bad Arolsen, Germany, in late June. It was a gratifying experience.

This archive created from Nazi Germany camp records and other materials found by the Allies after World War II was formerly a tracing service for information on individuals open only to requests from survivors and their families. By international agreement today, it is transforming itself into an historical archive while many holdings are being distributed in digitized form to national institutions in several countries.

Our purpose was to assess the ITS holdings for future scholarly research possibilities. Our group included senior scholars and an archivist and also junior scholars

from at least six countries. We were divided into four teams, each responsible in 10 days for combing one of four sections — concentration camp records, forced labor records, displaced persons records and ITS administrative records. Our shared judgment was that the collection is a gold mine for research although surely not all kinds, and scholars will find many new lines of scholarly inquiry opened up by having access to the materials.

Some persons interested in the Holocaust may have outsized expectations concerning the promise of the archive. ITS holdings include mainly Nazi concentration camp records from Germany and Austria, not from Poland, and mainly from camps that were liberated by the American and British armies. Hence there are few records on the Operation Reinhard death camps (Belzec, Sobibor,



Kenneth
Waltzer
Community
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and Treblinka), and only copies of records from the former Soviet Union on Auschwitz. Moreover, the holdings are unequal even among the camps in Germany and Austria. As an example, SS personnel destroyed the records at Bergen Belsen, so that camp is poorly represented.

On the other hand, the records from Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen and from several other camps and sub-camps are nearly complete, opening up some possibilities for comparative research and also huge possibilities for doing social history in the camps. It is possible with the records at ITS to follow persons from particular towns or by particular categories, say women or children, deep into the concentration camps, using transport lists, arrivals lists, block books, and personal cards. It will also now be possible using Gestapo records and camp records at ITS to historicize the develop-

ment of the camp system, which began in the 1930s and grew to new size and function during the war, and it will be possible to study better the practices of everyday persecution in the camps. For survivors and family members, however, there will be additional information available mainly only about those who were selected for slave labor and sent into the concentration camp system, not those who were selected to be sent to the gas chambers.

What Is More

The ITS holdings go far beyond Holocaust-related holdings, though. Alongside the Nazi slave labor and concentration camp system there existed a forced labor system involving seven-eight millions of non-Jewish Europeans. Scholars probing in limited time found that the system placed foreign workers under forced contracts deep into the fabric of everyday German life. Forced laborers

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