

Holocaust victims seek money due

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITER

The first of its kind in Michigan, a Conference on Compensation for Holocaust Survivors in Southfield is expected to draw record numbers this Sunday.

With a large number of influential Holocaust survivors in the Detroit area and older survivors who need money to pay for necessities, organizer Fran Victor of West Bloomfield said, "It's likely to be the largest conference on compensation in the country." The event could draw from 400 to 800, Victor said.

The event follows action this year by the Swiss government to provide a restitution fund, now totaling \$180 million and growing, "for needy surviving victims of the Nazis or their heirs," according to a May 1997 Department of State report.

"There's a tremendous outcry right now that these are our funds and they have been stolen," Victor said.

The conference is scheduled from 1-3:30 p.m. Sunday, May 18, at Congregation Shaarey Zedek on 11 Mile, west of Lahser.

"It's been 52 years since the end of the war," said Victor. "There's such a small window of time that we're going to be able to reach these survivors. They're dying every day."

"Survivors who attend the free event will learn about the efforts to help them both through private attorneys and representatives from the Claims Conference Article II Fund, an organization that limits the ability to

file claims to those receiving an annual income of \$16,000 or less per individual or \$21,000 or less per family, according to Elizabeth Tretyakova of the New York City-based Claims Conference.

Income-based claims brings this argument from Victor.

"Why should income be an issue in terms of compensation?" Victor said. "Most people lost their entire families. They suffered the unbelievable abuse and torture of concentration camps."

Southfield resident Martin Adler is one of those survivors. The oldest of five children, the only reason he lived through the Holocaust is because he was advised to lie about his age, telling Nazi soldiers he was 16-years-old instead of 14. He was sent off to work instead of his death.

Now a successful business owner of Domestic Furniture in Hamtramck, the 67-year-old is receiving some compensation for his loss. But he would like to know more about the liability of the company his father worked for since he was killed by a Nazi soldier while on the job.

Describing compensation as only "severance pay, which is no comparison at all for that," Adler said, "People were displaced from their homes and they were all... tortured and they were scared for their lives. Only a few survived."

Despite the horrors, Adler is thankful for the life he has lived. "Life is a miracle," he said. "The question is not how long we live, the question is how did we live. I'm grateful I live in a free country."

try. I'm grateful that the Jews are no longer second-class or third-class citizens."

The conference will feature a presentation by attorney William Marks, founder and principal of The Marks Law Firm, a Washington, D.C.-based law firm specializing in Holocaust-related claims. Marks works to increase health pensions for survivors, reactivate claims for those survivors who previously applied for this pension but were denied, and to pursue claims of German social security, property restitution, slave labor and Swiss bank inquiries.

Marks was part of the original U.S. litigation team working with the Swiss government to open records of survivor assets being held in Swiss banks.

Victor, president and executive of Victor/Harder Productions in West Bloomfield, will address the audience. She was an interviewer for Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, an educational project to record firsthand testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

Transportation is available from the Jewish Community Center, on the corner of Maple and Drake in West Bloomfield, and JCC's Jimmy Prentiss Morris Building on 10 Mile, east of Groer field, in Oak Park. Buses will depart for Congregation Shaarey Zedek at 12:30 p.m.

For more information, call Victor at (248) 539-4610 or the Holocaust Compensation Conference line at (248) 661-3008.



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