THIRTEEN SCHOOLS TUNE INTO GENOCIDE EDUCATION

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Lawrence High School Students

Category: Opinions

Tom Vartabedian, 16 June 2015

Merrimack Valley --- In what was a phenomenal approach to the genocide centennial this year, 13 schools called upon the Armenian Genocide Education Committee of Merrimack Valley to offer presentations to its students.

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In addition to the schools, committee members scoured the communities to visit a number of afternoon and evening service clubs, retirement centers and libraries.

Two television documentaries were filmed and six libraries displayed photography exhibits commemorating the centennial. The images portray vibrant country life as it remains today and not disturbing graphic images of 1915.

Of the 13 schools engaged, six of them came aboard for the first time, presumably due to the centennial. All of them invited return visits over the next school year.

Members agreed that although 100 years have passed, education should be an ongoing curriculum which should be provided so long as denial is being fostered in our midst.

“Over the last year, we have seen a tremendous awareness of the Armenian Genocide being raised by the educational community,” said Dro Kanayan, committee chairman. “Students are taking a keen interest in understanding what happened and where our people have come since then. They wonder about its effect upon our culture and how to prevent it from reoccurring in today’s society.”

In order to succeed in our endeavor, we need the continued support of the non-Armenian community,Kanayan added.

Among the participating high schools were: Billerica, Tewksbury, Lowell, Chelmsford, Tyngsboro, Lawrence, Haverhill, Andover and North Reading. Three others were also listed but withdrew due to

curriculum restraints caused by this winter's postponements.

The colleges engaged were Northern Essex Community College which offered a 3-hour block featuring a film "Orphans of the Genocide" and presentation by Dr. Ara Jeknavorian, who has compiled a provocative power point on Armenian history and geography.

At UMass/Lowell, Dr. Levon Chorbajian took the initiative once again with Gregory Aftandilian.. Both are faculty members and joined with the Genocide Committee in offering a panel on genocide.

Two middle schools hopped aboard: North Hampton, NH, and Melrose as teachers there combined their 7th and 8th-grade students.

"Most all the students knew little or nothing about the Armenian Genocide," said organizer Jean (Guiguizian) Vincent. "They came away with a sound education on human rights and the respect they should have toward people of different cultures."

The following libraries volunteered their exhibit space for pictures on Armenia: Haverhill, Chelmsford and Andover. Other bookings follow: Sandown, NH, for August; Westford for September; North Andover for October and Methuen for November.

In each case, Armenian children in those communities help set up the display and a photo opportunity for local papers.

Chelmsford truly took a big initiative this year in also inviting author Chris Bohjalian and showing a film repeatedly on Community Television Networks. Two programs were given at the library in addition to the exhibit.

Haverhill also did its part by filming an hour-long special about the genocide with visuals, led by Kanayan, Rev. Fr. Vart Gyozalyan and Barbara Arthur, who is chairing the local genocide committee.

The service club community was vastly tapped: In Haverhill, there was Exchange, Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis. Other civic communities also responded. At one genocide commemoration held at Hye Pointe Church, six Kiwanians showed up to lend their community support after being motivated by a presentation.

Residents from the AHEPA Apartments in Haverhill filled the recreation room for a talk, along with a breakfast group at the Wingate Nursing home which sponsored a public breakfast.

Repeated press coverage surrounded many of these activities which helped to garner invitations. A Monday Night discussion group at the former Lucent Technologies in North Andover was also enamored by the genocide story. The group's history dates back to the early 1900s.

The Genocide Education Committee was formed seven years ago in response to the state department's ordinance on increased genocide education in public schools. Since then, members have taken the initiative to contact schools and present discussions. In each case the results have

proven beneficial.

The initiative has since been extended to libraries, civic organizations and housing projects --- wherever the desire indicates.

“New schools are constantly being added,” said Kanayan, who remains a driving force in the endeavor. “Our history must never be forgotten. The centennial initiated some avid response this year which, we hope, will continue to accelerate itself in the years to come.”