

'We'll never forget it'

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WHS students involved in Asper Foundation's Human Rights and Holocaust Studies program recommend others follow in their footsteps

By Bryan Tait

When Canadian media mogul Israel Asper died in 2003, he not only left one of Canada's largest media companies, but also a legacy of work in the area of human rights.

On Oct. 27, a small group of Woodstock High School students became a part of that legacy.

Since 1997, the Asper Foundation, through its award-winning Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program has worked to promote tolerance and teach Canadian Grade 9 students about the consequences of racism. The program, which started in Winnipeg, went national in 2000 and provides students with an education on human rights and the Holocaust.

Since 2001, 101 students from New Brunswick schools have participated. Of that number, close to 50 have come from Woodstock High.

Each Woodstock student from last year's program was presented with a Memorandum for Personal Responsibility, the final component of the program. The presentation ceremony was part of an information session held at Woodstock High for students interested in participating in the program this year.

The memo was commissioned by the Asper Foundation, and written by Izzy Asper. According to the foundation's Web site, the memo "aims to provide each student with a sense of the importance that they participated in the program and to remind them that they have a personal responsibility for the world community."

WHS teacher Richard Blaquiere has been working with students for the last few years, taking them through the educational component of the program, and then taking the students to Washington, D.C., which is the third part of the program.

"It's not your typical trip for high school students," Blaquiere said. The students who go to Washington visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as other monuments relating



PHOTO BY BRYAN TAIT

These Woodstock High students took part in the Asper Foundation's Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program. Front row, from left, are Rachel Blaquiere, Michael Pierce, Erica McLellan, Hailey McBride, Britney Harris, Hannah Wilkinson and Ashley Chase. Back row, from left, are David Foster, Jessica Veysey, Aaron Wright, Ian Dunlop, Jennifer Flewelling, Hannah Steeves and Emily Slipp.

to freedom. Students who went on the trip last year saw the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, among other things.

The educational component, which consists of eight or nine two-hour sessions, covers a variety of themes covering the history of the Holocaust, as well as a history of human rights in Canada.

Students are also required to put in 16 volunteer hours. Last year, some students spent time at local animal hospitals, the Canadian Diabetes Association and the Salvation Army.

"It may seem like a lot of work but it's really worth it," said Hannah Steeves, a

student who participated last year.

The students also do a lot of fundraising to pay for the trip.

"We had the most incredible group of kids," said Karen Mifflin-Pierce. The group held a giant yard sale, a bottle drive, a penny drive, along with smaller events.

Blaquiere emphasized the burden can't be solely on the students.

"It's a family commitment," he said of the fundraising efforts.

The students considered the trip to be the highlight of the program. Along with the visits to the museums and monuments, last year's group had the opportunity to see a show at the Kennedy Centre, and had a very

rushed visit to the National Zoo on their last day.

The students also told a story about being stuck at Pearson International Airport in Toronto, and helping a Polish woman contact her family in Thunder Bay. Blaquiere said one of the students actually spoke a little Polish.

Last year's group highly recommended the program to this year's crop of Grade 9 students.

"It was the opportunity of a lifetime," said Steeves. "We'll never forget it."

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