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Holocaust survivors documentary to screen at Palm Beach film festival

BOWLING GREEN, O.—"Bearing Witness: The Voices of Our Survivors," a documentary film by Heather Elliott-Famularo of Bowling Green State University, will have its world premiere this April at the 2013 Palm Beach International Film Festival, recognized as one of the Top 25 Independent Festivals in the world.

Bridging the generations between elderly Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and today's youth, the film provided a forum for six remarkable people – the last known survivors in Toledo — to share their stories in their own words. The work was a collaboration between the filmmaker and the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo. Its goals were both to connect the youth of today with these survivors and document their stories for future generations to study.

"I cannot be more thrilled and honored that 'Bearing Witness' was accepted to screen at the Palm Beach International Film Festival," said Elliott-Famularo, an associate professor and chair of the BGSU digital art division. "I couldn't have imagined a better place to premiere and share the stories of our survivors with the world than in the vibrant Jewish community of Palm Beach, and on Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day)."

The Bearing Witness Project, initiated by Hindea Markowicz, director of Toledo's Ruth Fajerman Markowicz Holocaust Resource Center, brought together the six survivors with about 65 students, in grades 7-12, from the three area synagogues' Sunday Schools for face-to-face interviews, which were recorded by Elliott-Famularo and photographed by Dr. Dena Eber, a professor of digital art. With help from Elliott-Famularo, the students asked the survivors about their memories and experiences.

"A unique quality was captured in the interviews because the survivors spoke directly to the students, who were, in many cases, the same age as the survivors when they experienced the Holocaust," said Elliott-Famularo.

The survivors, Rolf Hess, from Germany; Al Negrin, from Greece; Philip Markowicz and Aron Wajskol, from Poland; William Leons, from Holland; and Clara Rona, from Hungary, had a variety of life experiences. Two were forced into the Lodz ghetto, most were sent to labor camps, and one was rescued and sent to a children's home. Another was hidden in the attic of a Mennonite family. All endured the tragedy of losing loved ones during the horrors that were the Holocaust.

The production team included executive producer Angel Vasquez of Docuality Network LLC and features original music by Los Angeles-based composer and sound designer Patrick Bowsher. BGSU School of Art students, under the direction of Elliott-Famularo, designed the film's motion graphics. "My goal with the maps and animations is

to emphasize the vastness of the Holocaust, to show that there were thousands of camps and ghettos that covered an entire continent,” said Elliott-Famularo.

Her first feature film, “Bearing Witness” is the first step in what could become a lifetime of exploration on the topic. She has already begun work on a documentary short, “The Last Torah,” which shares some of the personal and historic revelations discovered in the research process. She also will be continuing work on creating a short film for each survivor’s story that will include research trips back to the places in Europe where these events occurred.

The Bearing Witness project is sponsored by grants from the Ruth Fajerman Markowicz Holocaust Resource Center of Greater Toledo, the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, Bowling Green State University, the Dr. Phillip and Inge Horowitz Family Foundation, and the Anderson Foundation, with additional support from the BGSU School of Art, the artists, and private donors. A 501(c)(3) charitable gift fund has been established through the BGSU Foundation Inc. to accept donations for future aspects of the project.

Learn more about the project at the “Bearing Witness” website: <http://www.bearingwitness Toledo.com>.

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