

LAKESENTINEL.COM

Gay-straight club would benefit all students



LAUREN RITCHIE
Lake Front

First of two parts

Some years ago, when my daughter was in middle school, she came home and began telling a long story with a cast of characters that included a boy I apparently was supposed to know.

Who? I interrupted.

"You know," Eleanor replied with exasperation, "that gay kid."

Mom did *not* know, but she seized the opportunity to snap out an opinion just the same. Kids in middle school, Mom declared, don't know enough about their own sexuality to draw lasting conclusions about their sexual orientation.

Eyes may have rolled at this point.

Please turn to **RITCHIE, F6**

Neil
Simon
play opens
tonight F6

INDEX

CommunityF2
MoviesF2
PicklesF2

Programs offering study of night sky

BY AMY C. RIPPEL
Correspondent

EUSTIS — The Trout Lake Nature Center wants you to reach for the stars.

Through two astronomy-based programs this week, the nature center is hoping to encourage a greater understanding of the night sky and a better view of the universe around us.

The first program, at 6 p.m. Friday, will take place at the nature center, 520 E. County Road 44. Rob Bensko, a local amateur astronomer, will guide participants through a tour of the sky, the solar system and deep space.

Bensko, 53, has loved astronomy since he was a boy and called his program a crash course in cosmology and astronomy. He plans to speak for about 45 minutes to give participants a good foundation for looking at the night sky.

"I want to share my enthusiasm with others who come out," he said. "The one thing I want people to get out of this is in the scheme of things we're just here for a short period of time and stars last for billions of years."

For the second program, on Saturday, members of The Villages Astronomy Club will share their computerized telescopes for a deeper look into space. Participants will learn about star locations and constellation recognition.

The program will begin after sunset at the Lake Norris Conservation Area, located off Lake Norris Road. At about 7:15 p.m., there will be a night walk through the property to look for night critters and creatures.

Lavon Silvernell, Trout Lake's naturalist, said programs such as these give a better look at the universe and a deeper appreciation of where we live.

"It's mind-expanding and puts everything in perspective," she said of taking a look into deep space.

For more information about either free program, contact Trout Lake at 352-357-7536. Participants are asked to lower car headlights at Lake Norris to low beams upon entering the parking area. Insect repellent is encouraged.



RED HUBER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Participants can get a better perspective of the moon.

Kids get in touch with realities of Holocaust



TOM BENITEZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Helmut Zack, a Holocaust survivor, talks to high-school students during "The Nazi Scourge: Postal and Monetary Evidence of the Holocaust — A Breakdown in Humanity," a Holocaust exhibit that was in Leesburg on Monday and will be in The Villages today.

BY ELOÍSA RUANO GONZÁLEZ
Staff Writer

LEESBURG — Emmie Palmer several years ago visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp near the Polish city of Oswiecim. The 14-year-old Leesburg High School student walked through a gas chamber and saw a large glass display that contained hair shaved off the heads of thousands of Holocaust victims.

Palmer said those experiences were moving, but not as much as a traveling exhibit that stopped at her school this week. Unlike the visit to the camp and history museums, she was able to pick up and closely examine dozens of remnants and artifacts, including an armband with the Nazi swastika.

"That would have been in a glass case in a museum," she said. "Here kids can pick it up."

About 450 students from Lake schools visited the exhibit, "The Nazi Scourge: Postal and Monetary Evidence of the Holocaust — A Breakdown in Humanity."

The exhibit will be at The Villages' Savannah Center from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. today. The free exhibit will be open to the public.

This is first time the exhibit has been shown in Florida, said Sandy Lichterman, who along with his wife, Rae Jean, and friends Maurice and Libby Buring, helped bring the exhibit to Leesburg, The Villages and Ocala to honor their friend and Holocaust survivor Simon Waksberg. He died in 2010.

"He [Waksberg] didn't like to talk too much about when he was in a camp — few do," said Lichterman, 76. But the exhibit helps tell the stories of those who suffered horrific and painful experiences at the hands of the Nazis, he said.

Students picked up letters in laminated sheets that Jews sent to loved ones to let them know they still were alive. They also had a chance to listen to Holocaust survivor and Ocala resident Helmut Zack. His mother and uncle were killed during the infamous Night of Broken Glass. His mother's body was found tossed in the garbage.

"By picking up those artifacts, you can feel the horrors of the history of those pieces," Lichterman said. "It's not like a photograph. It's a real thing."

Daniel Spungen, 51, bought the artifacts at Pennsylvania stamp show in 2007. He had found a piece of a Torah scroll that a World War II German corporal used to wrap a parcel sent from Russia to his wife in Vienna. Spungen, who lives in the Chicago area, said it's important to teach the younger generations about this dark part of history.

"You've got to be more tolerant," he said to more than 100 middle- and high-school students. "You've got to be better than we were."

Jordan Olvern, 12, who has learned about the Holocaust and concentration camps, said the exhibit and survivor's presentation gave him "a better understanding of how many lives were taken" by the Nazis. The seventh-grader at Oak Park Middle School in Leesburg said he also learned about tolerance.

"You don't want to be a racist," Jordan said. "You should change the world."

Former Lake educator starts online-tutor business

Jason Ampel thinks the tutors he's hired for his new business have an edge over other traditional online instructors because all are certified teachers and all but two have master's degrees in their respective fields.

"I wanted to have only highly qualified, teaching professionals," said Ampel, a former public-school teacher in Lake and Orange counties who recently launched an online-tutoring business called The Learning Liaisons. "And I wanted to have a safe environment for students."

The part-time faculty member of the UCF College of Education said his business grew out of a growing sense of dissatisfaction with teaching in public schools for 10 years.

■ Goal is to "tutor, teach and motivate" students, F4
■ More education news, F4

Rosemarie Dowell

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