



Press Release

For More Information Please Contact:
Dawn Jenich, Marketing Director
847-388-3345
djenich@carmelhs.org

For Immediate Release

Carmel Catholic Social Studies Instructor To Exhibit Rare Holocaust Collection

Mundelein, IL—1/15/2009—As part of the course curriculum for a Carmel Catholic High School social studies class, “Holocaust and Modern Genocide,” Carmel faculty member, Mr. Jim Schuster has arranged for an exhibition of an award winning collection of some 250 World War II-era mail and documents that relate to the Nazi effort to exterminate Jews. The Spungen Holocaust Postal Collection is being made available to faculty, students and the public at Carmel Catholic High School on February 6, 2009 in the school’s South Conference Center from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The collection is owned by the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation in Illinois. The family acquired arguably one of the best-known collections of Holocaust materials related to stamps, covers, postcards, letters, bank note forgeries, and manuscripts from concentration camps and Jewish ghettos, from an avid stamp collector, Ken Lawrence of Spring Mills, PA. Mr. Lawrence painstakingly researched and assembled this collection of postal memorabilia documenting the range and depth of horrors of what he termed “the Nazi scourge” for over 30 years. He gathered items that showed not just the persecution of Jews and Communists but also other groups deemed undesirable by the Nazis, like gypsies and the disabled, not just in Germany but across Europe. Mr. Lawrence, a longtime civil rights activist and writer, began gathering the materials in 1978 “in response to the sudden appearance of Holocaust deniers.” “Some scholars have told me it is among the most important surviving evidence of Nazi desecration,” Mr. Lawrence said.

Mr. Schuster discovered the collection last summer. “A friend of mine invited me to his Rotary meeting as a guest when the Spungens were on the agenda to display the collection because he knew of my interest in the subject and the holocaust class I was in the process of designing. When Mr. Spungen learned I was a teacher, he offered to display the collection to my Carmel students.”

"I wanted to offer my students this opportunity to view the collection for a couple of reasons. In the first place, it is very unique. Secondly, the collection is very tangible. We can talk about life in the camps and ghettos, but this gives students a chance to see and touch a piece of history. It gives them a different and memorable perspective about our class discussions. It also confirms the reality of what we speak about," Mr. Schuster explains.

The Spungen Family Foundation offers the collection for public viewing at Holocaust and genocide educational venues around the world. The foundation has sought to expand the collection and continue to use it for the educational purposes that inspired Mr. Lawrence.

Daniel Spungen, a board member and spokesman for the foundation, said recently that his acquisition of the collection represented a "life-changing" experience for him. He is retiring from his job with the family business, a manufacturer of ball bearings, and devoting himself to further development of the collection, which includes rare letters from concentration camp inmates, postal documents illustrating Nazi activities and a Hebrew scripture re-used by a German soldier as a parcel wrapper.

"One of the most heartbreaking artifacts and historical evidence of Nazi desecration is a torn fragment of a hand-written Hebrew parchment from a Bible scroll. A German soldier used the Holy Scripture to wrap a parcel he mailed from Russia to Austria in 1942. The sacred parchment was pillaged from a Russian synagogue. Ironically, the portion used was the story of David and Goliath," Spungen said. Last year, after a chance encounter with Mr. Spungen at a collectors' event, Mr. Lawrence agreed to sell him his collection. "I felt like I had taken the collection as far as I could. And I'm 65," Mr. Lawrence said. A well-known stamp auctioneer had advised Mr. Lawrence to keep the collection intact rather than breaking it up to sell.

Mr. Spungen said he had originally planned to use part of his fortune to buy an "Inverted Jenny," one of the rarest of American stamps, which has an airplane misprinted upside down. But he said he changed his mind when he saw Mr. Lawrence's collection.

"I admit I knew next to nothing about the Holocaust, and now I'm playing catch-up," he said in a recent telephone interview. Among the items he finds most compelling are a piece of mail documenting sex slavery at the Buchenwald concentration camp and fake British banknotes made by Jewish slave laborers during the Nazis' program to undermine the British economy.

Mr. Spungen said that while the collection as a whole was insured for a million dollars, and the scroll used as a parcel wrapper could be worth as much as half a million dollars on its own, "the educational value to future generations is incalculable."