

Daily Sun Named Pulitzer Finalist for Local Reporting

The Villages Daily Sun's 2023 investigation into Hurricane Ian's immense death toll was named Monday as one of two finalists for the Pulitzer Prize, journalism's most prestigious honor. The prize was awarded to The Invisible Institute for an investigation into missing women, and the second finalist was The New York Times for its examination of law enforcement corruption in Mississippi.

The Daily Sun's monthslong investigation exposed how gaps in disaster preparedness failed Florida's most vulnerable residents — especially senior citizens — leading to scores of preventable deaths. It resulted in a new national forecasting tool, a new coastal warning system, new legislation at the state and federal level, state funding for safety barriers and the replacement of officials at the center of the reporting.

"The tenacity and courage of our team never wavered, even as they were tasked with bearing witness to death and prolonged suffering that in some cases involved their own family members," said Executive Editor Bonita Miyagi. "Their dedication to our readers is truly inspiring."



Daily Sun journalists, left to right: Senior Reporter Cody Hills, Senior Managing Editor Curt Hills, Executive Editor Bonita Miyagi, Senior Photojournalist George Horsford, Specialty Editor David R. Corder and Senior Managing Editor Adam Rogers overcame significant obstacles, from navigating the storm's aftermath to battling attempts to withhold public information. They spent 23 days traveling 7,300 miles to produce the six-part investigative series.



Joseph Cooke | Daily Sun

Stephen Poyner speaks to an audience of more than 1,000 about Jewish history during the annual Holocaust Remembrance service on Monday at St. Timothy's Roman Catholic Church.

Community Gathers to Remember Holocaust

By JAMES DINAN | Daily Sun Senior Writer

It took a few seconds for Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter to take in the question asked by Colton Young. Colton, a student at The Villages Charter Middle School, asked Gutter what his message would be for those in attendance at Monday's Holocaust Day of Remembrance gathering at St. Timothy Roman

Catholic Church in The Villages. "Tolerate each other," said Gutter, who was born in 1932 in Lodz, Poland. "Accept different cultures, religions and ways of life. Just live together and accept

Please See MEMORIAL, A8

VHA to Present Annual Show With New Format, Focus

By KEITH PEARLMAN | Daily Sun Managing Editor

The Villages Homeowners Advocates will host its largest event of the year with a new name and format at 7 p.m. Wednesday at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

"Our Community, Today and Tomorrow" will feature VHA president Peter Russell talking with local leaders about progress in the community, what's to come in The Villages, and what the VHA is doing to advocate for

the highest quality of life for residents.

Mark Morse, president and CEO of The Villages, is unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict but will appear via a video conversation with Russell.

Russell sat down with the Daily Sun ahead of the event to talk about what attendees can expect to learn from the show.

Please See VHA, A9



Submitted photo

Mark Morse, left, president and CEO of The Villages, shakes hands with Peter Russell, president of The Villages Homeowners Advocates after filming a video to be shown at Wednesday's "Our Community, Today and Tomorrow" event.

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According to team captain Ann Pelle, The Villages Twirlers & Drum Corps rock. The group has been entertaining residents of The Villages for over 20 years. With over 100 members such as Melinda Graham, of the Village of DeLuna, the group takes pride in putting on the best performance possible. The group has three teams: The Show Team, the Parade Corps, and the Drum Corps. Members wear custom-made attire and perform routines led by Pelle. Email Pelle at anntwirls@comcast.net for more information.

—Greg Hughes, Daily Sun



Rachel Govola | Daily Sun

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from the front page

MEMORIAL

Continued from A1

one another.”

The audience of more than 1,000 responded to Gutter's remarks, but Gutter wasn't there to see it. Gutter, who now lives in Canada, appeared through the USC Shoah Foundation's Dimensions in Testimony project. Stephen Poyner, education director of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center in Maitland, demonstrated the program during this year's gathering, entitled "We Remember!"

"Over the course of one week, Pinchas Gutter was interviewed by the USC Shoah Foundation, answering between 1,000 and 1,500 questions related to his experience in the Holocaust and his life," Poyner said. "Gutter appears on the computer, which will find the appropriate response to questions asked by the audience, and he will respond accordingly."

Four middle school students, who won prizes in Temple Shalom of Central Florida's Holocaust Education Writing and Art Competition, were given the opportunity to ask Gutter questions to demonstrate how the program works.

"Even today, I'm still learning from Pinchas Gutter's answers," Poyner said. "We are blessed that he and others agreed to participate in this project."

Poyner said such technology is important to keep the memories of the Holocaust alive for future generations. He noted that young people today don't understand the significance of the Holocaust.

"One national poll revealed that 48% of Gen-Z and Millennials surveyed couldn't name a single concentration camp," he said. "Sixty percent did not know how many people were



Randy Orras, center, of the Village of Newell, joins others in reading a prayer during Monday's Holocaust remembrance service at St. Timothy's Roman Catholic Church.



Howard S. Kosofsky, front, a Village of Sabal Chase resident and a member of Marine Corps League North Lake Detachment 662, presents the colors at Monday's remembrance service.

Photos by Joseph Cooke | Daily Sun



Sixty percent did not know how many people were killed in the Holocaust. And one in five Gen-Z and Millennial survey participants in New York City believed that Jews were responsible for the Holocaust. This has to stop."

STEPHEN POYNER
education director of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center

killed in the Holocaust. And one in five Gen-Z and Millennial survey participants in New York City believed that Jews were responsible for the Holocaust. This has to stop."

Temple Shalom and others from the area frequently remind the community of the horrors of the Holocaust, where more than six million Jews and others were killed across Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II.

But World War II ended nearly 80 years ago, and the number of Holocaust survivors, eyewitnesses and liberators are dwindling. The New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also known as the Claims Conference, announced this past January that there are 245,000 Holocaust survivors still living in more than 90 countries. Just under 16%, or around 38,400, live in the United States. The median age of these survivors is 86, and 95% of them were born between 1928 and 1946.

"The data forces us to accept

the reality that Holocaust survivors won't be with us forever, indeed, we have already lost most survivors," said Greg Schneider, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

Gutter was one of the first people interviewed for the Dimensions in Testimony

project by the USC Shoah Foundation. The foundation was created in 1994 by filmmaker Steven Spielberg to videotape and preserve interviews with Holocaust

survivors and witnesses. "Technology like Dimensions in Testimony, as well as the stories of living Holocaust

Please See NEXT PAGE

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from the front page



Joseph Cooke | Daily Sun

Rabbi Zev Sonnenstein, of Oxford, helps Remi Wrona, of The Villages, light a candle on a menorah during the remembrance service.

Continued from PREVIOUS PAGE

survivors and those who are Second and Third Generations, are important to continue our work against hate and prejudice," said Susan Feinberg, a Village of Pennecamp resident and chair of the Tri-County Holocaust Remembrance Committee, which puts together the ceremony.

Feinberg herself is Second Generation, the daughter of Hungarian Holocaust survivors.

"We are seeing religious discrimination everywhere," she said. "Colleges in the U.S. are in turmoil. The Anti-Defamation League reported at least 8,873 anti-Semitic acts in the U.S. in 2023, which is more than the previous three years combined."

Feinberg and others stressed the importance of education in keeping the stories of the Holocaust alive. The committee presented Sumter County Schools Superintendent Richard Shirley with an award for promoting Holocaust education in the area.

Awards also were given to middle school students at The Villages Charter Middle School, South Sumter Middle School and Wildwood Middle High School for their work in Temple Shalom's Holocaust Education Writing and Art Competition.

"We received around 100 nominations this year, and the schools had hundreds of submissions to consider," Feinberg said. "Our local schools are doing a great job in helping children remember."

Monday's ceremony concluded with the lighting of the menorah to honor

Holocaust survivors and honored guests. Four local Holocaust survivors participated in the candle lighting — Paulette Shiffman, Remi Wrona, Gunther Glaser and Seymour Rosenberg. For Rosenberg, who was born in Poland, it was the first time he participated in this ceremony, being added to the lighting at the last minute.

"Honestly, we only met him recently," Feinberg told the audience. "It is great to know that we are finding and discovering Holocaust survivors who call this area home."

World War II veteran Irving Locker lit a candle in honor of the U.S. military and liberators. There also were candles lit in tribute to clergy, educators and the Second and Third Generation community.

The gathering also featured music from the Temple Shalom Choir and Community United Methodist Church's God's Echo Choir. Solos were performed by Pinky Begley, Robert Stehman, Jan Ettienné Jusino-Medina, Syd Tenenbaum and Temple Shalom Rabbi Zev Sonnenstein. "This is a perfect example of houses of worship coming together to stand up against hate and to remind people to never forget," Feinberg said. "We must keep that message alive."

Temple Shalom of Central Florida plans to put a video of Monday's Holocaust Day of Remembrance ceremony online at tscfl.org in the coming days.

Senior writer James Dinan can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5302, or james.dinan@thevillagesmedia.com.

VHA

Continued from A1

Q: To start, why does the event have a new name this year and what is the new focus?

A: Well last year Mark Morse stood on the stage and explained he used to have a yellow pad of new things coming to The Villages to announce. But he can't do that anymore. And you probably know the reasons. With the internet, once plans are filed people find it and post it. And you have the drones flying over construction areas. So that information is already public, and I don't have a problem with that, that's just the way things are evolving. So instead of talking about things people already know, we saw an opportunity.

Last year, we also talked about the three-legged stool — with the three legs being the Developer, the District and the VHA. So we want to talk more about the relationships that are making those three legs even stronger and how that leads directly to improved quality of life for everybody in The Villages.

Q: Who will be the guest speakers at the event?

A: Mark Morse is not going to be there this year. He wanted to make it, but something came up. So Mark and I got together and had a wonderful conversation we filmed. We talked for a little over an hour and they edited it down to a 22-minute video we're going to show. Then, in-person, we're going to have Kenny Blocker and Carrie Duckett from the District talking about many of the great things that happened in 2023 and so far in 2024 and where they are going with their five-year outlook.

Then we're going to have what I expect will be a very informative discussion with John Rohan, with Recreation

WATCH THE PRESENTATION

"Our Community, Today and Tomorrow" airs on VNN (Comcast Channel 2, Daily Sun Mobile App) at 8 a.m., noon, 4 and 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

and Parks, Drew Craven, with The Villages Grown, Bob Trinh, with The Villages Health and Heather Long, with UF Health. I want to talk about health and wellness. I feel like these are the four best people to have that discussion. You're talking about recreation and the activities we can do for physical and social well-being. Then you have Villages Grown and how nutrition and eating the right

foods is a form of medicine. And The Villages Health offers classes and programs for health and wellness. And they have the primary and specialty care doctors for when you do have an issue. And lastly, there's the hospital for when you do need something fixed and they can get you rehabbed so you can get back to your lifestyle. That might be a bit of a pipe dream to present it like that, but I think it makes for a perfect circle.

Q: What do you envision as the primary focus of the evening?

A: For me, that's easy. It's the quality-of-life component I keep coming back to. We talked about the three-legged stool, well I want to create a second

three-legged stool for our organization — the VHA. I see the three legs as one for advocacy, that's what we've done since our inception, advocating for maintenance and enhancement of the community in a positive manner. There's another leg for philanthropy, getting involved and making a difference by helping other organizations. For the third leg, there's the health and wellness component. We created an expo last year and we're bringing that back. So now you have your three legs and the way I see it the seat on that stool should be engraved with "Quality of Life." You have advocacy, philanthropy and health and wellness, isn't that a great formula for quality of life.

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