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CITY



WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Babs Asper, left, widow of CanWest Global Communications Corp. founder Israel Asper, and daughter Gail, admire the charcoal drawing of Mr. Asper by Ottawa artist Eli Benzaquen. The drawing was presented to them yesterday.

Canadians must learn more about history of human rights, Asper daughter tells students

BY RICHARD STARNES

A group of Ottawa high school students heard yesterday that the decision to build a Canadian Museum for Human Rights was taken because the subject is ignored by institutions across this country.

"They don't touch any of this," Gail Asper told the 41 students at a special ceremony at Yitzhak Rabin High School on Woodroffe Avenue.

"Students should learn about the Holocaust, about human rights from a Canadian perspective. But this doesn't exist."

Ms. Asper and her mother, Babs, were at the school to present certificates to Grade 9 students who had completed a Holocaust and Human Rights studies program, and to unveil a charcoal drawing of the late Israel Asper by Ottawa artist Eli Benzaquen.

The school presented the

drawing to the family to honour the memory of Mr. Asper, founder of CanWest Global Communications Corp.

The studies program, completed so far by 3,000 Canadian students and supported by the Asper Foundation, includes a field trip to Washington.

"In Washington, you go to the Holocaust Museum and to the Smithsonian," said Ms. Asper, who is managing director of the foundation.

"You learn about the march in the U.S. for women's rights, about black American rights and Hispanic labour rights. And you go to the Jefferson Memorial and think about the Declaration of Independence."

"But what about Canadian stories? The Museum of Civilization is a wonderful organization, but it talks about totem poles and the history of the aboriginal people. But you're not going to hear about residential schools,

about the Canadian story of the First Nations, about Nellie McClung."

"You are certainly not going to hear about the Holocaust and you're not going to hear about the Charter of Rights."

"When Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler talks about the Charter of Rights, he is passionate that this is one of the most important, well respected, studied documents around the world. Yet Canada doesn't celebrate that Charter anywhere."

It was this hole in our history that spurred Mr. Asper, to launch plans for the human rights museum in Winnipeg. He intended it to be the largest human rights institution in the world and the largest Holocaust exhibit in Canada.

"We want to help teach Canadians about our history and help eliminate intolerance through the recognition of human rights as the foundation of human

equality," Ms. Asper said.

The Aspers and Mr. Cotler later attended a luncheon at the National Arts Centre to celebrate the Israel Museum's Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Mr. Cotler said: "what we are seeing today is the emergence of a kind of new, escalating, global, virulent and even lethal anti-Jewishness that is grounded in classical anti-Semitism. It is the discrimination against, denial of, assault upon the right of Israel and the Jewish people to live as an equal member of the family of nations."

Last night, at a black-tie gala at the museum, the Community Rules Scroll was dedicated to Mr. Asper. Daniel Ben Natan, vice-president of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, made a presentation to Mrs. Asper.

WITH FILES FROM DAVE ROGERS AND JENNIFER CAMPBELL