



For Release:

May 3, 2023

Shawsheen Valley Technical School Hosts “The Courage to Remember” Exhibit

BILLERICA – In honor of Genocide Awareness Month, Shawsheen Valley Technical School displayed “The Courage to Remember” exhibit, a loan from McQuade Library at Merrimack College. The exhibit was originally developed by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and was donated to Merrimack College by the Perlitsh family. The exhibit is a 40-panel visual narrative that tells the story of the Holocaust.

“This is an exciting, timely, and important opportunity for Shawsheen,” shared Principal Jessica Cook as she spoke about the display. “The goal of the exhibit is to proactively build understanding of prejudice and human rights,” an effort the district has made to improve and meet the aims of the Genocide Education Act.

The Genocide Education Act, signed by Governor Baker in December 2021, went into effect this school year. The act requires schools to integrate genocide education into curriculum. As described in the law, the purpose of genocide instruction is threefold 1) To promote a broader understanding of human rights issues in general 2) To examine the patterns of genocide that show how prejudice and hatred impact societies 3) To reject group-specific targeting and prejudice that can lead to violence and genocide.

English teacher Sara Belson and Director of Academics Danica Johnson led the initiative with a team of eight Shawsheen educators. The team compiled instructional resources, informed families about the display, and prepared students to view the content in a respectful and commemorative way.

The Courage to Remember exhibit offers new and compelling insights into the Holocaust through four major themes: Nazi Germany (1933-1938), Moving Toward the “Final Solution” (1939-1941), Annihilation in Nazi-occupied Europe (1941-1945), and Liberation Building New Lives. The exhibit consists of 40 panels, although only 16 were displayed at Shawsheen.

This was the first year Shawsheen hosted the exhibit, and it was exclusive to staff and students. Next year, the district plans to open the exhibit to the community and expand the display to include student projects.

Braintree and Medford Public Schools previously hosted the display.

Sara Belson shared, “This exhibit was a positive educational experience for Shawsheen students and staff... everyone was respectful and actively engaged when moving through the presentation.”

Superintendent McIntosh echoed positive remarks about the exhibit and thanked those involved. He said, “This partnership has allowed Shawsheen to provide an interactive experience to our students that would have been difficult for us to recreate on this scale. Thank you to the Shawsheen staff and community partners who made this possible.”



Mrs. Belson gives credit to Dr. Gorman Lee, the Director of Social Studies at Braintree Public Schools, for sharing the student prompts used in conjunction with the exhibit. Additionally, Belson thanks Shawsheen educators Katia Arida, Cam Hendley, Stacy LaBella, Dave Marone, Kerry O'Brien, Rob McIsaac, Christy McKee, and Peter Udstuen for collaborating to make the exhibit a success.

As part of Shawsheen's events relating to Genocide Awareness Month, a group of 60 seniors visited the Holocaust Memorial in Boston, and guest speaker Paulette Buchheim will share her family's Holocaust survival story during a school assembly on May 8.

About Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational School District

Established in 1965, Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District (SVRVTS) is a student-centered public institution serving the five member towns of Billerica, Bedford, Burlington, Tewksbury, and Wilmington. Shawsheen Valley Technical High School serves more than 1,300 students in grades 9-12 and is "Dedicated to Excellence in Education", integrating academics with more than 20-vocational-technical career pathways.

Shawsheen is located in Billerica, MA on a sprawling 100-acre campus. The school building features state-of-the-art facilities and athletic fields, twenty-four varsity sports, and dozens of extra-curricular clubs and activities. All of Shawsheen's faculty and staff are committed to the mission "to provide a positive learning experience in a safe educational environment that encourages all students to reach their full potential, emphasizes the value of a strong work ethic, and prepares them for adult life in a competitive world."

Shawsheen Valley Regional Vocational Technical School District also provides high-quality educational programming for youths and adults through Adult Education, Afterschool Exploratory Programs, Community Events, and Summer Camps and Enrichment Programs. Shawsheen is consistently working to increase its rich and varied programming opportunities for the community, which supports its mission that education is a lifelong, continuous process with many paths to living a successful and fulfilling life.