



French city to honor Pittsburgh historian whose work records the plight of its Jews during WWII



HALLIE LAUER
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

FEB 7, 2022

6:00 AM

Working on a research project about persecuted Jews living in German-occupied Amiens, France, during World War II, a local historian and archivist has found a shared experience between his work and Pittsburgh, and as a result of his studies, is being awarded a medal from Amiens this week.

Through his research, David Rosenberg, 78, of Mt. Lebanon, created the “Who is a Jew? Amiens, France 1940-1945” exhibit, which has been displayed across Pittsburgh since 2018, including most recently at [Duquesne University](#) for its commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Until 1940, there were no official French government records to indicate who was a Jew.

The research focuses on recovering the “inaccessible history of the Jews” in Amiens, as well as personalizing the stories of 43 Jewish people — more than half of whom died at the Auschwitz concentration camp — who had been living there during the war.

“I want to bring forth as much as I can,” Mr. Rosenberg said. “I think it’s important to emphasize — unfortunately — the global nature of it.”

Mr. Rosenberg, who worked for the University of Pittsburgh prior to his retirement, spent every summer between 2010 and 2018 in Amiens doing his research. On Tuesday, he will be awarded the medal of the city of Amiens by Mayor Brigitte Fouré.

During his time [researching the project](#), Mr. Rosenberg was able to help return archival files from where they were in Paris, about 70 miles north, to their home in Amiens.

“I was happy that the materials were repatriated, but in a situation where you’re sort of facing ongoing antisemitism and the same old story, [I felt] that it needed to be communicated in other ways,” Mr. Rosenberg said.

That feeling is what led him, with the help of his daughter Lydia Rosenberg, to create the exhibit and [accompanying website](#).

Mr. Rosenberg will attend the medal ceremony on Tuesday virtually, though Mayor Fouré and some of Mr. Rosenberg’s French colleagues will attend in person. Other friends and family members also will be able to livestream the ceremony.

The ceremony will be the first “official recognition” of the study by Amiens and “in essence their endorsement” of the need to preserve the “historical truth,” Mr. Rosenberg said.

He’s “happy to be honored this way,” but bringing these stories “out of obscurity and into the light of day” is his focus, he said.

“I certainly don’t need any more resume lines, but there’s something about finding and then trying not to lose something,” he added.

Mr. Rosenberg and his family had been members of the Tree of Life / Or L’Simcha Congregation in Squirrel Hill before his family moved to the

South Hills. During his acceptance speech, Mr. Rosenberg plans to discuss the 2018 Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh.

“I’ve laid hold of something here,” Mr. Rosenberg said. “When I first started this project, there was no Tree of Life massacre. It was 2011. When I first did the exhibit, there was no Tree of Life massacre. And then there was.

“And now when I go over there, I don’t feel like lecturing them on antisemitism in France so much, because a terrible thing happened to us. Rather it’s a matter of sharing and learning about each other,” he said.

In addition to multiple exhibits in Pittsburgh, Mr. Rosenberg’s work has been seen at high schools and universities in France. Many of the residents have been open to accepting this part of France’s history.

In the future, Mr. Rosenberg is hoping to facilitate a student exchange between Pittsburgh and Amiens so that education on these topics continues.

“This work that I’m doing could make some people feel bad,” he said. “I don’t think that’s a reason for not presenting it. People feel bad because humanity has not behaved well. What hope do we have of doing better if we’re not willing to address the things that are true?”

Hallie Lauer: hlauer@post-gazette.com

First Published February 7, 2022, 6:00am

We hope you enjoyed this free article.

Get unlimited story access for only 99¢.

Subscribe

Limited time offer.
