

Emotional commemoration marks Wallenberg centennial  
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An emotional commemoration ceremony was held in Côte St. Luc this past Friday to mark the 100th anniversary this year of the birth of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat credited with saving some 100,000 Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.

Last week's event, held at Bialik High School, is the first major ceremony in Montreal to mark the heroism of Wallenberg, who was captured in January 1945 by the Soviets - accused of being an American spy -and whose fate has remained unknown for the past 67 years. Wallenberg was credited throughout the ceremony of saving more Jews than any single government, by giving them Swedish passports, keeping them in safe houses and preventing the blowing up of the Budapest ghetto. Wallenberg was Canada's first honorary citizen.

The commemoration was a collaboration between the City of Côte St. Luc, the English Montreal School Board, JPPS-Bialik, the Israeli consulate, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and the Teaching of the Holocaust for Educators program. Côte St. Luc Councillors Mike Cohen - also EMSB spokesman - and Allan Levine co-hosted. Also on hand at Bialik were numerous community leaders and students from Bialik, Lauren Hill Academy in St. Laurent, Westmount High School and Marymount Academy in NDG. Holocaust survivor Ron Meisels, whose life was saved by Wallenberg, was moved by Friday's ceremony. "To think there was one man who saved all these lives, and he couldn't save his own - we still don't know what happened to him," he told The Suburban. Meisels also expressed tribute to Archbishop Andrew Hutchison, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, for enabling a bust of Wallenberg erected at what is now Wallenberg Square downtown.

In a video testimonial, Meisels recalled how his mother secured a Swedish passport from Wallenberg for her son and husband, Meisels' step-father; and how Wallenberg, answering Meisels' mother's pleas, saved his step-father, who was about to be deported by train to a death camp.

"Of the 3,000 people who were on that train, from which my step-father was taken off, three people came back," Meisels tearfully told the students following the video.

Israeli Consul-General Joel Lion encouraged the students to enter a Quebec-wide contest in which entrants speak on camera about the legacy of Wallenberg and enter it on YouTube. The contest is a collaboration between the Israeli, Swedish and U.S. consulates.

Mount Royal MP Irwin Cotler, who worked to try and determine Wallenberg's fate, commended Côte St. Luc for its remembrance ceremonies and Human

Rights Walkway, and urged the city and Bialik to have a Raoul Wallenberg Commemorative Day each Jan. 17, the anniversary of Wallenberg's 1945 capture. "That day has been set aside by Parliament so that Canadians can learn about, reflect upon, be inspired by and act upon Wallenberg's great humanitarian legacy," the MP added. "He demonstrated one person can stand up and confront evil, can prevail and transform history."

"Wallenberg was a righteous person among nations," said D'Arcy McGee MNA Lawrence Bergman. "He taught us one person can make a difference. He sacrificed his life to save innocent lives, the lives of those who could not defend themselves. He is a symbol of justice and humanity."

Côte St. Luc mayor Anthony Housefather, whose city named a street after Wallenberg and included a plaque in his honour on the Human Rights Walkway at Trudeau Park, said it is important to remember Wallenberg's story. "Many times, we talk of the tragedies of the Second World War, but there's also heroism," Housefather told the students.

Alice Herscovitch of the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre said while it is vital to remember all the individuals who were killed during the Holocaust, "it is equally important to focus on the individuals who were heroes. "Thankfully, they were numerous, but not numerous enough," she said. "Raoul Wallenberg stands out as one of the great heroes of the Second World War."

EMSB commissioner Syd Wise, whose own wife was saved in Belgium as a child during the Holocaust by a Catholic woman, said there were "many examples of extreme heroism during the war."

Thomas Hecht, on behalf of the Riva and Thomas O. Hecht Scholarship Program for Teaching of the Holocaust for Educators, also noted that Wallenberg did more than any single government to save Jews. "They were the nations of silence in many respects."

Peter Rona of the Canadian Friends of Raoul Wallenberg, whose father was saved by Wallenberg, announced that another major commemoration ceremony will be held 5:30 p.m. May 23 at Wallenberg Square, behind the Anglican Church, at 600 de Maisonneuve West.

Students Tori Pearlman and Allix Caron also spoke about Wallenberg's importance.

"He was a treasure of humanity," said Allix.

Also on hand for the ceremony were Côte St. Luc Councillors Dida Berku, Steven Erdelyi and Ruth Kovac; EMSB commissioners Bernard Praw and Ellie Israel; and many others.