

NHD Students Rock Their Research

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For four Cherry Hill eighth-graders searching for a subject for a prestigious history contest, it was almost as if Camden native Josiah DuBois chose them.

From the street named posthumously for DuBois outside of Asha Mohapatra's neighborhood development to the commemorative World War II era coin that history teacher Chrissy Marrella picked up randomly at an antique fair in Florida, signs seemed to be everywhere; the humble Quaker who forced the United States government to take action to rescue thousands of Jews from Nazi concentration camps was a ripe topic for exploration.

And sure enough, as soon as the Rosa Middle School teens delved into the topic, their mission became much bigger than winning a national contest. After devoting thousands of hours each to researching his life—and even uncovering recently declassified documents shedding more light on his heroics—they are committed to making his name and deeds more widely recognized.

“We love our project so much; it’s hard not to gush,” admitted Shayna Herzfeld, 14, a M’kor Shalom congregant. “It’s the story of this amazing person who gets absolutely no recognition. Of course we want to win, but we also want to make sure that this man, through our project, is known.”

National History Day (NHD) is a yearlong project that culminates in an international competition June 11-15 at the University of Maryland. Working as small groups or individually, this year’s participants chose a topic based on the theme “Taking a Stand in History” to

create an original project. So far the group sailed through a regional contest, held in March, and became one of two groups (both from Rosa) to advance in April’s statewide competition to the national level in the documentary division.

DuBois’ story could not be more tailor-made for the theme. As a young assistant general counsel in the Treasury Department, DuBois risked his career and ignored anonymous threats to expose how the U.S. State Department had been obstructing efforts to rescue Jews from the grips of the Nazis. His searing expose, a lawyerly treatise called, “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of Jews,” led to the creation of the War Refugee Board (WRB) by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Appointed the Board’s general counsel, DuBois arranged for the rescue of some 200,000 refugees, many of them Jews, through determination and creativity, including providing money for the bribery of border officials and the production of forged documents.

Through thousands of hours each of research, the teens felt like they got to know DuBois. Known as “Joe” to his friends, he never spoke of his war heroics, not even to his son Robert, now an octogenarian who drove from Ocean City to eagerly meet up with the teens.

“We were always wondering why he did all this,” said Shayna. “Robert did tell us that one time, later in life, he had a dinner with Jews whose lives he had saved. He didn’t like to speak to crowds but he told them he spoke because he didn’t want history to repeat itself. He said he only wished he could have done more.”

For more personal details, they

Goodwin, a close friend of DuBois who established a humanitarian award in DuBois’ memory given out annually through the Jewish Community Relations Council.

Goodwin said he was pleasantly surprised when the teens called to inquire about his when the teens called to inquire about his longtime friend. Goodwin said he and DuBois grew close as a result of the lawyer’s work for his father’s home construction business in the booming postwar years.

“He was a very modest man but he eventually told me everything,” said Goodwin, who spent long hours with DuBois going through permitting processes with local municipalities.

Besides establishing the humanitarian award, Goodwin said he has tried in vain to get more international recognition for DuBois, who also was a prosecutor during the Nuremberg Trial of the German chemical company I.G. Farben, which used hundreds of thousands of Jewish slave laborers in its factories and supplied the Nazis with the poison used in the gas chambers at the death camps.

He said Yad Vashem officials said they

Rosa Recognized

from No Place, p. 4 Hate School was Cherry Hill High School West. Receiving individual recognition at the ceremony was Rosa 8th grader and Learning Community 7 student Asha Mohapatra. Out of almost 300 submissions, Asha’s essay about a theme related to struggle won honorable mention in the 7-8th grade division.

These two awards are tangible evidence of Rosa’s commitment to valuing and respecting every person.