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Witnesses speak

LEAH and FAU team up on Holocaust video project

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The League for Educational Awareness of the Holocaust made a six-figure gift to Florida Atlantic University that will bring 5,000 video testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses to the university, including 4,000 from Florida residents.

Right now, FAU has 325 testimonies stored at its Boca Raton campus that students and scholars can access.

The testimonies will come from the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive in Los Angeles, established by film director Steven Spielberg in 1994.

Robert Alrod is the president of LEAH, a non-profit organization that was founded 11 years ago.

"It was developed of the mandate. The Florida Legislature passed a mandate to the effect that lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides of the 21st century should be taught to



Ken Frankel, head of reference at S.E. Wimberly Library assists Alyse Ergood, assistant librarian, as they watch and listen to Holocaust survivor Simon Friedman (on computer monitor) of Coconut Creek using the Visual History Archive at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. Staff photo/Kimberli DiMare

kids from kindergarten through the 12th grade," Alrod said. "Over the years, the organization has held a number of fundraising events and provided funding, up to about \$1,200,000, to projects in the school system to help

teach children, using lessons of the past, as to what happens when hatred and bigotry go unchecked."

Jeff Schilit is associate provost and chief information officer at FAU. After the school and the Shoah Foundation negotiated a

contract allowing FAU access to the Foundation's archives at USC, it became Schilit's job to handle the technical infrastructure.

"One of our original goals was to have the Florida testimonials available

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on campus for immediate review by children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors who live in Florida," Schilit said.

LEAH's gift will enable FAU to buy a server and storage to hold those 4,000 testimonials, as well as another 1,000 testimonials from outside Florida.

Alrod said having the testimonials in Boca Raton will be a wonderful and educational asset.

"It's a very exciting time for South Florida and the university. To my knowledge, it's one of six or seven universities in the country that have this kind of facility," Alrod said. "The testimonials are a source of history, which show, among other things, what the socio-economic situations were at the time

things were going on."

Kristine McGrath is an assistant vice president and press secretary at FAU. She said the testimonials have educational significance beyond the *Shoah*.

"It can actually support a wide variety of academic coursework, not just Holocaust studies," she said. "They will be used by classes in a wide variety of areas. Not just to study the Holocaust, but to study European history and styles of clothing and all sorts of things."

Alrod said LEAH's initial gift was \$114,000 and he expects to see more as the program is expanded.

"It's a phenomenal education tool if you subscribe to the theory that you must learn from lessons of the past by listening to those who have actually experi-

enced, through their testimonials," Alrod said.

To learn more about the League for Educational Awareness of the Holocaust, visit www.leahforkids.org. To learn more about the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California, visit www.usc.edu/vhi.