

Arson destroys Indiana Holocaust museum

Joanne Laurier
20 November 2003

A museum dedicated to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust in Terre Haute, Indiana, was set on fire and its contents destroyed Tuesday. The Candles Museum was torched after a wall of the building was spray-painted with an homage to Timothy McVeigh, the right-wing terrorist who was convicted in 1995 for the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building. McVeigh was executed at the federal prison near Terre Haute in 2001. The fire caused an estimated \$15,000 in damage.

Founded in 1995 by Holocaust survivors Eva and Michael Kor, the museum derives its name, Candles, from an acronym: Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Experiments Survivors. Eva Kor, orphaned at Auschwitz, was one of 180 children rescued from the concentration camp at the end of World War II. During her incarceration Eva and her twin sister Miriam were the subjects of barbaric experimentation by the notorious Nazi, Dr. Joseph Mengele, who particularly valued twin children as his guinea pigs.

Currently Kor is the lead plaintiff in a class-action lawsuit brought against the giant German pharmaceutical company Bayer in federal court in Terre Haute. Kor is claiming that Bayer, assisted by Mengele and the Nazis, injected inmates with toxic chemicals and germs in order to test the company's experimental drugs.

A WSWS reporter spoke with Mary Wright, the museum's education director:

"At this point, the fire has been designated as an arson. Someone wrote 'Remember Timmy McVeigh' on the outside wall. As a teacher, I find this very peculiar, because he has always been referred to in the media as 'Timothy.' It was as if the arsonist or arsonists personally knew him. A brick was thrown through the front door followed by a fire accelerant that was very hot. In less than 10 minutes from the first call received by the fire department at 12:02 a.m., there

were 10-foot-high flames shooting up through the ceiling. The fire was hot enough to melt the millions of pennies that kids had collected to benefit the museum. There were 11 jars of pennies to symbolize the 11 million victims of the Holocaust.

"We lost everything. We did not have a lot of artifacts, but we had pictures and posters. We called our exhibition 'History on the Walls' because there were posters, pictures and maps to present the history of the Holocaust to students.

"In the eight-and-a-half years that we've been here, there has never been an obscene phone call or a threatening letter. We see and speak to 5,000 to 8,000 people a year. Last year 2,300 students came to the museum between January and May—students from all over Indiana and Illinois. It is a unique museum because when you come you always speak to a Holocaust survivor.

"The KKK started in Indiana and the organization's first president was from Indiana. This area has always had trouble with diversity, but it was not rampant and the museum never had problems.

"We are going on the assumption that it was someone from the Aryan Nation or another such organization. Somebody assumed that if our base of operation was attacked, we would be stopped. This incident has crushed our dreams, but not our determination to help understand hatred and prejudice—that everyone deserves the right to be respected. If this had happened during the day, the person sitting at the front desk would have been killed—although we had enough exits to evacuate everyone else.

"Terre Haute was the museum's home because Eva's husband Michael was liberated in 1945 from the Magdeburg concentration camp, which was part of Buchenwald, by a colonel from Terre Haute.

"To make our community a better place is a passion with all of us at the museum. This incident is not going

to stop us—we are going to stay and repair or rebuild.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact