

Holocaust tapes are back on shelf - Outpouring of goodwill, donations followed destruction of Riverside Public Library videos

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Author: Joseph Ruzich, Special to the Tribune. Tribune staff reporter Brett McNeil contributed to this report.

Richard Hirschhaut, the executive director of the Holocaust Foundation of Illinois, believes the best way to fight extremism is to learn about the Holocaust.

After police in July said self-described white supremacist Richard Mayers, 33, of Berwyn implicated himself in the destruction Holocaust-related videos at the Riverside Public Library, Hirschhaut wasn't going to sit on his hands.

In response to the incident, the foundation donated replacement copies of the vandalized videos to the library. Some of the donated videos included "Memories of Kristallnacht" and "Holocaust: The Story of Man's Inhumanity to Man." In addition, an anonymous Riverside family donated a number of Holocaust-themed books and DVDs.

Riverside Library Director Janice Fisher said people started calling immediately after the incident wanting to help. "The cost of all the damaged videos would have only been about \$100, but it's wonderful that people wanted to help in the face of this crime," Fisher said.

Police say Mayers admitted in a written statement to ruining five VHS tapes in the library July 5. Mayers, a one-time follower of imprisoned white supremacist Matthew Hale's defunct World Church of the Creator, wrote in his statement he believes the films are full of lies, according to police.

About a week after the library incident, Mayer was charged with misdemeanor disorderly conduct after twice giving a Nazi salute in a Lake County courtroom to a man charged with a hate crime, according to officials.

Mayers was at a hearing for Patrick Langballe of Lake Villa, who was later sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for his role in an attack on two teenage girls at a park near Zion that authorities said was motivated by the girls' saying they were lesbians. Mayer is due back in court in March on the disorderly conduct charge.

Hirschhaut, who previously was the Midwest director of the Anti-Defamation League, said he has been aware of Mayers and his affiliations for some time. He said the destruction of the tapes at the library "was a hateful and destructive act." "The community is entitled to learn about the Holocaust and its implications for our world today. And the notion of denying that right to the community is un-American."

Riverside Assistant Police Chief Thomas Weitzel said Mayers wasn't charged with a hate crime in the library incident because he did not make a direct threat toward a person. He was charged with one count of misdemeanor criminal damage to property, but Weitzel said Thursday that the misdemeanor charges against Mayers were dropped Aug. 19. No one from the library appeared to pursue charges against Mayers at a hearing inside the Maywood branch of the Cook County Circuit Court.

The Holocaust Foundation of Illinois, which operates a Holocaust museum in Skokie, helped channel legislation in 1990 requiring all Illinois public schools to teach students about the Holocaust. The law was recently enhanced this summer to require schools to teach issues related to genocide.

"The law is one of the greatest achievements of our organization," said Hirschhaut.
"The law is a watershed that has helped us reach thousands of young people and teachers."

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