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On a remembrance mission

Restoring forsaken cemeteries, she honors the Jews lost in Europe

BY JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER
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Today marks Holocaust Remembrance Day, or *Yom Hashoah*. In the 65 years since the liberation of Nazi concentration camps — where 6 million Jews perished — people around the world have developed countless forms of memorial.

A Town of North Hempstead councilwoman participates by restoring cemeteries in Eastern and Central Europe. Her work involves not only graves of those who died in the Holocaust, but also older graves that fell into neglect because of it.

“It’s very meaningful to me,” said Lee Seeman, 81, of Great Neck Estates. “They worked, they lived, they struggled, they died. In the end, we have to honor them by seeing that the cemeteries are in some kind of order.”

It’s a project she has undertaken because the Holocaust is a part of Jewish history that can’t be overlooked. She said her husband, Murray, a former mayor of Great Neck Estates, lost 30 to 40 uncles, aunts and cousins in Czechoslovakia.

President Bill Clinton appointed Lee Seeman in 1995 to the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad.

Keeping cultures alive

The commission of volunteers works with foreign governments to preserve cultural heritage sites around the globe. Seeman is one of 20 appointees, five of them from New York State.



As a member of a U.S. heritage commission, Lee Seeman of Great Neck Estates memorializes those lost in the Holocaust and earlier generations by bringing order and monuments to neglected sites.

“Cemeteries, places of worship, Holocaust memorials — these are all the guts of what the commission does,” said chairman Warren L. Miller of McLean, Va., adding that work is not limited to Jewish sites.

The commission has preserved sites for the Roma people, also known as Gypsies, rebuilt Catholic churches in Slovakia and established a

scholarship to honor Protestant missionaries in Bulgaria, Miller said.

President Barack Obama’s visit to the concentration camp in Buchenwald, Germany, last year was one of the commission’s projects, Miller said.

Seeman focuses on projects that involve restoring cemeteries. “We have to honor the dead, that’s my feeling,” she



Above: a cemetery in Riga, Latvia, where Seeman has done work. Her next project: tending to gravestones in Serock, Poland, below. At another Polish site such stones paved a walkway to a Gestapo office.



said. “You can’t just let it go and disintegrate.”

And now, to Poland

Seeman’s next project will take her to Serock, Poland, where she said “30 stones are lying lonely on a hill.”

She’s working with the commission to obtain the necessary permits and permission from the government there to build a memorial monument.

“We don’t know where they belong,” she said of the neglected gravestones. “It’s the last remnants of a Jewish community.”

Serock is where Rep. Gary

Ackerman’s mother once lived. Eva Barnett, who died in 1996, was 5 when her family left for the United States in 1923, said Ackerman (D-Roslyn Heights). The family settled in Brooklyn, and his mother never went back.

“After they left, there were no Jews left in the town,” he said. “They were all afraid to go back.”

About 10 years ago one of Ackerman’s uncles visited Serock and went in search of the town cemetery, only to find gravestones knocked over or broken.

See CEMETERIES on G26

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WINNERS

Compiled by Michael Ebert

Edward Kaja
Mechanical engineer



Edward Kaja of Roslyn Heights has received the Sustainability Achievement Award from the U.S. Department of Transportation for his efforts in promoting federal energy management. Kaja is a mechanical engineer at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, where he recently initiated installation of geothermal water-source heat pump systems in renovated dorms. He also helps maintain a hydrogen- and solar-powered house as part of the academy's alternative energy program.

Tracey Kuczinski
Senior housing advocate



Tracey Kuczinski of Northport has received a certificate of appreciation from New York State Women Inc., for her community service efforts. Kuczinski is co-editor of "The Golden Guide," a resource guide for Long Island senior citizens. She has also worked as a certified occupational therapist in various local rehabilitation units and is a member of Gerontology Professionals of Long Island and New York and the Senior Umbrella Networks of Suffolk and Nassau counties.

Cedomir Petrovic
Physicist



Cedomir Petrovic of Sound Beach has received the Marko Jaric Award from the Marko Jaric Foundation for his achievements in physics. Petrovic is a physicist at Brookhaven National Laboratory, which he joined in 2002, and is one of the principal investigators in the lab's Energy Frontier Research Center, which is used to research the underlying nature of superconductivity in complex materials. He is also an adjunct professor of physics at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Teresa Reid
Community relations manager



Teresa Reid of Floral Park will be honored at the fourth annual Spring Swing Invitational golf tournament hosted by the Mill Neck Family of Organizations for her dedication and service to Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf. Reid is the community relations manager for Barnes & Noble in Manhasset, which she joined in 1995, and has helped to sponsor a number of author visits and holiday book drives at Mill Neck. She is also a certified yoga instructor.

NOMINATE SOMEONE AS A WINNER. Send e-mail information about the accomplishment or honor to winners@newsday.com, or mail to Winners, Newsday, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY 11747-4250. Please include a photo; color is preferred. Photos will not be returned.

Tending Jewish graves

CEMETERIES from G28

Ackerman told Seeman about the forsaken grave markers, which led her to get involved with the project.

Seeman said she hopes the project will be complete by the end of the year. When it is, Ackerman said, he plans to attend the unveiling. "There's a particular pride knowing it's the ancestral home of my family," he said.

Seeman is also working on building a monument at a cemetery in Riga, Latvia.

Miller praised Seeman's devotion to her passion. "Lee is wonderful. She's enthusiastic and dedicated," he said. "And she exemplifies what a public servant should be."

Seeman, who has four children and is semiretired from a career as an insurance broker, said her first project involved traveling three times, at her own expense, to Wyszków, Poland, for a Holocaust memorial where head-

stones of a Jewish cemetery had been used to shore up riverbanks and pave the walkway to the local Gestapo office.

The memorial, completed in 1997, is an 80-foot monument surrounded by about 250 headstones, found in places such as barns and building foundations, said Seeman.

She then focused on building a monument where those held in slave labor camps died in the forests of Estonia. In 2005 she spoke at a dedication of a memorial marker in Klooga, Estonia, which was attended by the country's president, Arnold Rüütel. "He actually apologized for what happened during World War II at these sites," she said.

She recalled reading from her favorite prayer: "They lie at rest in nameless graves. . . . Yet, they shall not be forgotten. We take them into our hearts and give them place beside cherished memories of our own beloved."

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