

John Carroll School mourns loss of alum who raised awareness of Holocaust

The sudden loss of Andrew Klein came as students at his scholastic alma mater were receiving more lessons in empathy for and knowledge of others, thanks to his example and the foundation begun by his family.

Klein, the president and CEO of Forest Hill-based Klein's Shoprite of Maryland, was one of two fatalities in a multivehicle accident in Bel Air the morning of March 11.

The 65-year-old was a 1971 graduate of The John Carroll School, and returned to serve as a business manager, trustee and parent. He received the Rev. Charles K. Riepe Award, its highest alumni honor, in 1985, when his legacy at the only Catholic high school in Harford County was just beginning.

In the mid-1990s, Klein, a member of Temple Adas Shalom in Havre de Grace, helped the John Carroll community begin to raise awareness of the Holocaust, the genocide undertaken by Nazi Germany that took the lives of 6 million European Jews.

The Bel Air school's 25th annual Holocaust Remembrance Day was held the same day Klein died. John Carroll's annual field trip to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., made possible in part by Klein's Shoprite Charitable Fund, will go on as planned March 13.

"That's a fitting tribute to him," said Louise Géczy, the senior project coordinator at John Carroll.

She coordinates its Holocaust Remembrance Day, which began with Klein's support. At this year's event, students met and heard the stories of 24 men and women, primarily survivors, but also liberators and witnesses, and, as that generation dies off, their descendants.

“He was a very humble, self-effacing man,” Géczy said. “On more than one occasion, I told him, ‘Andy, you’ve changed lives.’ The event became something that seniors not only anticipated, they would come back and say it was among the most meaningful experiences they had at our school.

“When you come face to face with someone who is a living piece of history, it’s hard not to be affected. Our students get to see how survivors have dealt with life, and how joyful they are about the fact that they exist.”

With assistance of the Baltimore Jewish Council and The Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore, John Carroll has also become a regular host to a holocaust awareness event that draws hundreds of students from more than a dozen other high schools in the area. Its next “Lessons of the Shoah” will be held March 19.

John Carroll will also hold a Genocide Awareness Vigil April 10. The school provided a video of Klein speaking at the vigil last year, when he shared that he was the first Jewish graduate of John Carroll, and that his interest in the topic was sparked by the Rwandan genocide of the early 1990s.

“We are all messengers of the Almighty, regardless of whether we’re Christian, Jewish, Muslim,” Klein said. “We’re only instruments here for a very, very short time.”

In 2017, Klein received the Baltimore Jewish Council’s Ponczak Greenblatt Families Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education.

Klein’s entry in the 1971 John Carroll yearbook shows that he played football and lacrosse, was active in student government, and president of the glee club. His daughter, Sarah, was a 2001 graduate of John Carroll.

“Andy Klein was an exceptional force at John Carroll for over 50 years,” Steve DiBiagio, the John Carroll president, said in a statement shared by the school. “His kindness, compassion and humanity inspire us all to be better people. We will miss him dearly but will carry his legacy forward. He will never be forgotten.”

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