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PRESS RELEASE

PARTICIPANTS PREPARE FOR YAD VASHEM INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR FOR EDUCATORS IN ISRAEL

MONTREAL, JUNE 6, 2011– Seven teachers from Quebec, including two from the English Montreal School Board, will leave for Israel in July for a three week experience as part of the Yad Vashem International Seminar for Educators.

From the EMSB, teachers Jason Lipstein (General Vanier Elementary School in St. Léonard) and Stacey Blumer (Lester B. Pearson High School in Montreal North) were selected as recipients of the 2011 Riva and Thomas O. Hecht Scholarship, Teaching of the Holocaust for Educators Program. Spiritual Community Animator Vince Lacroce (Laurier Macdonald, General Vanier and Dalkeith) was also chosen to take part, but he had to cancel due to family commitments. The Hechts are also sponsoring two teachers from the Lester B. Pearson School Board: Anne Edgar (St. Edmund Elementary School in Beaconsfield) and David Barbiero (Beaconsfield High School).

Annie Frenette, who teaches at a private French school, is being sponsored by Victor David; Myriam Provost, from a French public school in Joliette, is going thanks to the assistance of Dana and Bill Bell while Sabrina Moisan, the educational coordinator for the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, will also accompany the group with the support of Irwin Tauben, Janice Levine and Miriam Shuster.

The teachers can now look forward to taking part next summer in a professional development program under the direction of the Faculty of the Yad Vashem Seminars for Educators from Abroad, International School for Holocaust Studies. The goal of the program is to provide professional development activities to teachers for teaching about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism to students in the youth Sector. Scholarship recipients will receive both pre-training and follow-up activities sponsored by the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and the Bronfman Jewish Education Centre. An orientation program is available prior to leaving for Israel. Each recipient will be asked to create at least one teaching unit or module developed within the context learned at the Yad Vashem experience for implementation in the classroom. The unit/module has to be incorporated into the Quebec project-based curriculum and be considered for integration into the areas of cultural, language, history, literacy or art-based activities.

Recently the Hechts hosted a dinner for the recipients, sponsors and organizers. Two previous winners from the EMSB, Linda Shetzer from Parkdale Elementary School in St. Laurent and Donna Perlin from St. Monica Elementary School in NDG were on hand to share their experience.

Yaron Ashkenazi, executive director of the Canadian Friends of Yad Vashem in Toronto, noted that the International Educators' Seminar was launched in 1995 and since that time approximately 3,000 teachers from all over the world, including Canada, have participated. Educators from public and private Jewish educational frameworks come to Yad Vashem from North America, Australia, South America, and Eastern Europe. "The international flavor of the seminar allows the educators to experience the diverse understanding and pedagogical imperatives of their colleagues," said Ashkenazi, who served in a special paratroop unit of the Israeli Defense Forces, and as an officer in the Personal Protection Unit of the Israeli Shin Bet. "The seminar provides educators with the facts of the Shoah and the pedagogical tools to teach this sensitive topic."

The seminar is built upon three major pillars; academic, pedagogical, and experiential, reflective of the educational philosophy of the school. Ashkenazi notes that the academic component takes educators through the history and culture of the Jewish people in the interwar period, a people with diverse interests and roots – not a people born as victims. The pedagogical component provides participants with the tools to translate this academic content into suitable pedagogical materials that are age appropriate and multi-disciplinary. Field trips across Israel are also planned that will connect educators not only with the recent history of the Jewish people but also with its ancient roots in the Land of Israel, providing a context for the Holocaust and its aftermath.

"The Canadian Society for Yad Vashem strongly believes that education is the number one instrument to creating a more tolerant society and compassionate community," says Ashkenazi. Over the past eight years, the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem has sent more than 100 educators to attend the seminar. The Hechts have been responsible for 17 of those.

Alice Herscovitch, the executive director of the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, expressed her appreciation to the local sponsors to make such a program possible. She welcomed them to use her Centre upon returning, something which many of the past winners have done – notably putting non-Jewish students in contact with Holocaust survivors.

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