

'Paper Clips' teaches Holocaust horror

Student-inspired documentary opens Jewish Film Festival in BR

BY CHARLES LUSSIER
Advocate staff writer

A movie about simple paper clips and what teenagers in rural Tennessee did with them revealed the persistence of hatred and the cleansing power of memory for nearly 1,000 local schoolchildren Thursday.

The students of Whitwell Middle School collected paper clips, once a symbol of resistance to Nazis during World War II, and turned them into a Holocaust memorial.

A documentary about the project, "Paper Clips," was shown twice Thursday at Independence Park Theatre in Baton Rouge.

Whitwell's assistant principal, David Smith, told his young Baton Rouge audience that they, too, have the power to change the world.

► Complete schedule of the Jewish Film Festival. Today's Fun section.

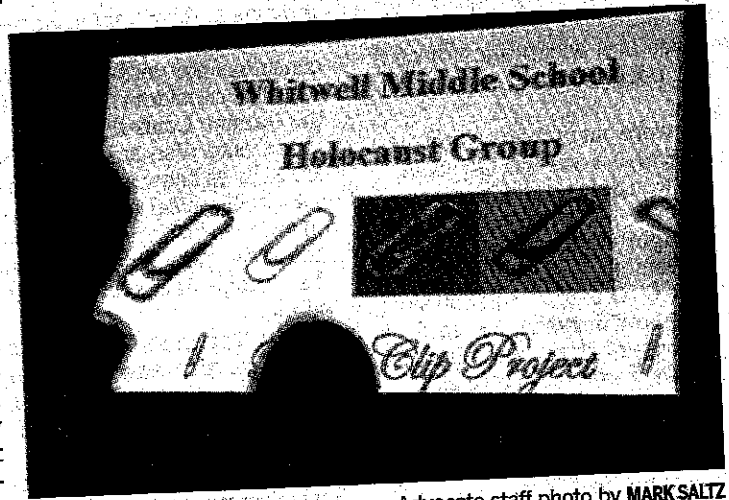
"You don't have the right to vote," Smith said, "but you have a voice, and you need to use it."

Struggling to grasp the enormity of the extermination of 6 million Jews, Whitwell students in 1999 came up with the idea of collecting 6 million paper clips.

Over the next three years, the students met Holocaust survivors from around the world. The documentary reveals how the experience transformed not only the students but their community.

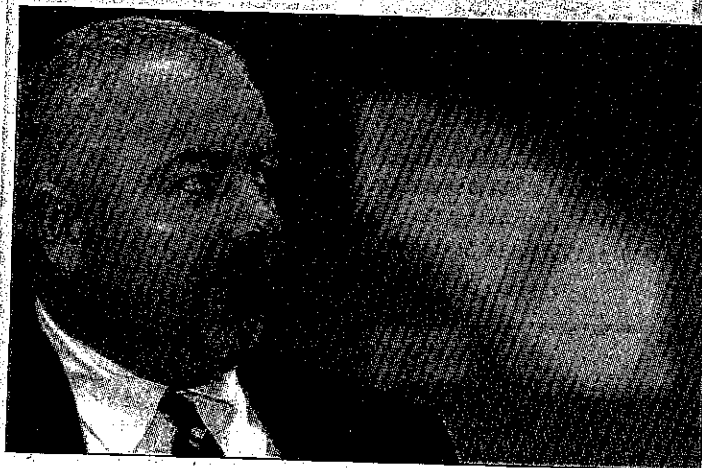
The students eventually collected more than 33 million paper clips. The clips are on display in an actual rail car that transported Jews to the concen-

► See 'PAPER CLIPS', page 2B



Advocate staff photo by MARK SALTZ

Students from schools throughout the Baton Rouge area gathered Thursday at BREC's Independence Park Theatre to watch 'Paper Clips,' a documentary film about how students at Whitwell Middle School in Tennessee paid tribute to the 6 million Jews killed during the Holocaust by collecting millions of paper clips.



Advocate staff photo by MARK SALTZ

David Smith, assistant principal of Whitwell Middle School in rural Tennessee, answers questions Thursday after the screening in Baton Rouge of 'Paper Clips,' the documentary about his school's Holocaust project. Smith challenged Baton Rouge area students to work to spread tolerance and acceptance of people of different religions and ethnic backgrounds.

'PAPER CLIPS'

Continued from page 1B

tration camps. The car is now a museum on the school grounds in Whitwell.

The small, almost completely white, Protestant community northwest of Chattanooga, Tenn., is an unlikely location for such a memorial.

Smith said he and fellow educator Sandra Roberts wanted to do something to help their isolated, culturally homogeneous students understand the world's diversity. The educators saw with frustration as Whitwell children left for college only to return home months later because they were unable to handle the culture shock.

In Baton Rouge, the film's message resonated with Park Elementary teacher Lydia Trammell.

Since November, Trammell's fifth-graders have studied the Holocaust. She said she traded e-mails with a teacher from a much different school, Frost School in Livingston, to explore ways to teach their children.

"What we really want to teach in our schools is tolerance for each other," Trammell said.

For Park Elementary's Kywan Conrad, 11, the treatment of the Jews was mind-boggling. "I couldn't believe) when the peo-

ple were put in the cars and they didn't have no food," she said.

Gwen Scichowski, who homeschools her five children, brought three of them to the screening. "I thought it was pretty cool," Scichowski's daughter Jerusha, 15, said of the paper-clip project. "It made me want to be at that school."

Evidence of hate is on display today, she said, noting comedian Michael Richards' bizarre racist tirade.

Gwen Scichowski's son, Solomon, 13, was struck by the cruelty inflicted on the Jews, making them scapegoats for Germany's many problems at the time.

"I thought it amazing all that those people would go through all just because people wanted to blame someone," he said.

"Paper Clips" was the first film shown at the Baton Rouge Jewish Festival, which continues through Sunday. The screening was sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Baton Rouge and The Advocate.

► ON THE INTERNET:

The Paper Clip Project:
<http://www.marionschools.org/holocaust/index.htm>
 Movie site: <http://www.paperclipsmovie.com/>
 The Holocaust:
<http://www.ushmm.org/>
 The Baton Rouge Jewish Film Festival: <http://www.brjff.com/>