

CVHEN

Founder and President Receives Community Service Award

by Elissa Einhorn, Managing Editor

Elizabeth Igra, Founder and President of the Central Valley Holocaust Educators' Network (CVHEN), was a Community Service Award recipient at the 2015 Unity Bar Dinner.

This annual event brings together members of seven local diversity bar associations to bestow awards to community members and scholarships to deserving law students. Participating bar associations are the Leonard M. Friedman Bar Association (LMFBA); the Asian/Pacific Bar Association; Sacramento Lawyers for the Equality of Gays and Lesbians; Women Lawyers of Sacramento; La Raza Lawyers Association; the South Asian Bar Association; and the Wiley W. Manuel Bar Association.

"The genesis of the Unity Bar Association was to develop a network for identification and advancement of minority judges," explained Marc Koenigsberg, LMFBA's President and Master of Ceremonies for the event. With "... serving as an educational resource, voice and forum for Jewish attorneys and judges on issues relating to the practice of law, the courts and the community" as its mission, he said, "LMFBA gives opportunities for Jewish judges to be active in their own legal communities."

In front of 325 people at the October 29th dinner, Igra accepted her award and joined the esteemed club of past LMFBA honorees, such as Judge Judy Hersher, Dan Gorfain,



Elizabeth Igra, left, accepts the Community Service Award from Marc Koenigsberg, Leonard M. Friedman Bar Association President. Photo Credit: Junn Paulino.

and Betty Reuben. Each of these individuals, said Koenigsberg, "are people who have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to service to the Jewish community, or who have dedicated their lives in furtherance of Jewish values."

Igra, a Holocaust survivor and veteran teacher, founded CVHEN, which "is dedicated to supporting teachers in effectively implementing a Holocaust curriculum that meets California Social Studies and Language Arts Standards. With an understanding of the constraints that teachers face, we help them respond to a variety of challenges that this complex curriculum presents. We offer ongoing follow-up training and resources that build upon the foundation laid by acclaimed programs that offer Holocaust education seminars."

Among its accomplishments since its inception in 2009 are 12 workshops to more than 200 teachers from several school districts; 15 speaking engagements during 2014-2015 alone; the creation of a 2nd Gen Speakers' Bureau; programming events, such as an annual Kristallnacht commemoration; and its newest addition, the CVHEN Library and Resource Center housed at Mosaic Law Congregation.

"Our goal," said Igra, "is to raise the awareness of the importance of knowing and understanding history because it effects every aspect of our lives."

A survivor of the Czorkow ghetto, Igra is focused on helping others understand how the Holocaust could happen within a democratic society. Alluding to the Unity Bar event's keynote speaker, 4th District Court of Appeal Associate Justice Richard Fybel, whose parents escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 and whose presentation was entitled, "Lessons from History: The Failure of the Judiciary in Nazi Germany and the Post-War Nuremberg Trial of Judges," Igra said, "It is not enough to empathize with its victims. In Germany, there was an allegiance to the furor. It raises a fundamental question regarding the role of the judiciary and how it adjudicates laws and how they are prosecuted. The fact that German judges abdicated their responsibility to democratic principles and gave their allegiance to Hitler's laws was of great significance. There is so much to history and to the antecedents of the Holocaust. I think we forget how important the actions of these judges were."

And while she is happy that there is continued interest in the subject of the Holocaust, interest is simply not enough.

"As Jews, we need to think of it as part of our heritage and culture and need to understand and know," Igra said. "I don't want monuments. I want people to be curious and to learn and to ask questions. The stories will be told and the memoirs read, but there needs to be more questions."

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