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## Holocaust Exhibit Gets Kids Thinking

By [Leann Holt](#)*Journal Staff Writer*

When Ginel Wheaton heard her friends pick on each other in the hallways of Sandia High School, she never gave it a second thought.

She found herself shrugging off racist jokes that flew around classrooms.

And bullying? No big deal. Just part of the high school landscape.

But over the last couple of weeks, Wheaton and some of her friends have come to see their apathy in a different light. The illumination came through a traveling Holocaust exhibit and an 82-year-old man who lived through the horrors of Nazi Germany.

"I hear kids talking in the halls now, and I just go 'wow,'" said Wheaton, who volunteered to help with the exhibit. "They're doing damage and they don't know it. This has made me more conscious of others."

The exhibit, "Choices: Through the Eyes of Students," examines the gradual erosion of human rights and the public inaction in Germany that allowed Adolf Hitler to rise to power and the extermination of 6 million people.

Throughout the 21 informational panels that make up the display, students are encouraged to make a connection between the intolerance, stereotyping and verbal abuse they see around them and the atmosphere in Nazi Germany.

"It changes your mind-set and changes your view about what you say about someone," Sandia student Maria Ration said. "Before, I didn't think about it."

The exhibit came to New Mexico through the New Mexico Foundation for

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Human Rights Projects. It will be on display at Sandia High School through Friday and will travel to four other New Mexico schools over the next several weeks.

Student volunteers from each school are responsible for presenting and advertising the display and acting as docents for daily tours, said Regina Turner, executive director of the foundation.

On Tuesday night in the Sandia High School library, Cor Suijak, president of the Contemporary Holocaust Education Foundation in New York, brought history to life for the 50 or so parents and students who came to see the exhibit.

Suijak told the audience he was a high school student in Holland in 1942 when Jewish students and teachers began to disappear. When a Jewish schoolmate committed suicide, Suijak began to speak in defense of the Jews.

Suijak said it was too late to help his friend— something that still haunts him.

"I can't overcome the feeling that I failed to do what I should have done," Suijak said. "I hope I can help people come to better decisions."

Former Sandia principal Bob Hennig said he hopes the display will encourage students to speak up when they see kids being bullied.

"It happens with kids all the time; they know it's wrong, but they don't say anything," he said.

Ration said the exhibit has expanded her perspective.

"You get self-centered and just think about your everyday life," she said. "But if we're not careful, (the Holocaust) could happen again."

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