

REMEMBERING HISTORY

80 years after Auschwitz, lessons of late Peabody Holocaust survivor live on

By Caroline Enos

» Staff Writer

PEABODY — Holocaust survivor Sonia Schreiber Weitz carried with her a horrific story when she moved to Peabody in the late 1940s.

Just three years earlier, at 16 years old, Weitz had been liberated from the Mauthausen death camp in Austria after surviving four others, including Auschwitz.

She weighed 60 pounds and was weak with typhus when American troops found her. Except for her sister, Blanca, and brother-in-law Norbert, all 84 members of her family had been murdered by the Nazis — all for the sole reason of being Jewish.

It's a story of hate Weitz herself called indescribable. Yet, she dedicated her life to finding the words to tell it through her poetry and many discussions with young students.

As Jan. 27 marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, her friends and family insisted that it must not be a story lost to time.

"If we forget the Holocaust, we will dishonor the memory of the victims who number in the millions, including more than 6 million Jewish souls," Lapin Foundation Executive Director Debbie Coltin said at a Zoom event honoring



MARK LORENZ/Staff file photo

The late Sonia Weitz is seen in this 2007 photo at the Holocaust Center when it was located at the Peabody Institute

Weitz's memory on Jan. 20.

"Today, we remember and we don't forget," she said.

Weitz died from cancer at age 81 in 2010. She spoke to thousands of schoolchildren and college students during

her life and was a member of the council advising the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.

In 1982, she created the Holocaust Center Boston

North in Peabody with her friend Harriet Wacks. The center merged with Salem State University following her death and is now known as the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Weitz's story started in Krakow, Poland. Her happy childhood morphed into one strained by the persecution of Jewish people once the Nazis invaded the country in 1939.

It was in the Krakow Ghetto, where Jews were forced to live in overcrowded apartments with little food, that Weitz began seeing her family disappear and, eventually, learned of their murder.

Weitz described the time and the rest of her experiences during the Holocaust in the recording of a speech she made before her death that was played during the Jan. 20 event.

"The very first victim in my family was an uncle of mine who was arrested together with the leadership of his city, my uncle Henrik, and he was taken to Auschwitz before it became a real death factory," she said.

"He was killed, and his ashes were sent to my aunt. This is the first time I saw my father cry, and of course, would not be the last."

Weitz survived for a time using false papers that said she was 14, older than her real age, as the Nazis were rounding up all children under 14 at the time, and also papers that claimed she was Aryan, not Jewish, so she could sneak out of the ghetto. Her mother also dyed her hair blonde to make the lie more convincing.

The changes protected her for only so long.

Her mother was soon put on a transport of Jews

See **WEITZ**, Page S4



REAL NEWS IN SCHOOLS

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Continued from Page S1

heading to concentration camps, never to be seen again.

With the Nazis banning Jews from having pencils and paper, Weitz turned to writing poetry in her head to document what was happening and, in her own way, try to make sense of the devastation.

One of her most poignant poems details one of her last memories of her father.

Weitz, her father and her sister were taken to their first camp together. Separated by sections for men and women, Weitz snuck into her father's bunkhouse and shared a dance with him to the song of another prisoner's hidden harmonica.

"I danced with you that one time only.

"How sad you were, how tired, lonely ...

"You knew that they would 'take' you soon ...

"So when your bunk-mate played a tune

"You whispered: 'Little one, let us dance,

"We may not have another chance."

Weitz's poem was true. Her father was taken away shortly after and was killed just two weeks before the end of World War II.

She and her sister would be moved between death camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe and endured the Nazi's most heinous treatment.

They shivered with fever in bunkhouses with little food and no heat, worked as slave laborers in Nazi war factories, struggled to breathe in stifling cattle cars and stepped over bodies during excruciatingly long death marches.

She called the Black American soldier who found her upon the liberation of Mauthausen a "Black Messiah."

"The horror on his face is something that even in my state, I cannot ever forget,"



DEBORAH PARKER/Staff file photo

In this 2010 photo, Sandy Weitz, of Peabody (daughter of Sonia Weitz), places a flower and candle on the stage during Day After Night, the Holocaust Center Boston North's annual interfaith commemoration of the genocide, held at Peabody Veterans Memorial High School.



BARBARA KENNEDY/Staff file photo

Sonia Weitz listens to the children's choir from the Cohen Hillel School sing during an interfaith commemoration of the Holocaust held at Peabody Veterans Memorial High School in 2003.

she said.

It took four decades for Weitz to open up about her

survival of the Holocaust. During the Jan. 20 event, Mayor Ted Bettencourt

and District Attorney Paul Tucker recalled attending Weitz's speeches over the



KEN YUSZKUS/Staff file photo

In this 2010 photo, Holocaust survivor Sonia Weitz speaks to eighth-grade students at Higgins Middle School in Peabody. She is asking the students if they read her book.

years. For Bettencourt, it was as a student at Peabody Veterans Memorial High School.

"I always remember her speaking about being an upstander, being somebody who sticks up for people and is there for people in

difficult moments and won't stand by and allow something terrible to happen," he said.

"To be somebody that is on the good side, helping one another, really, that's what life is all about," he said.

DAR recognizes students with awards

From staff reports

The Daughters of the American Revolution Cape Ann Chapter recently celebrated local seven high school students.

The students each received a \$500 check.

Each student distinguished him- or herself through outstanding leadership, honor, service, courage, and patriotism, all the qualities promoted by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Sandy Barry and Connie DeSimone, co-chairs of the chapter's Good Citizens Committee, presented Good Citizen Awards to the students:

Martin Emerson Baum of Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District.

Emily Eve Hannibal of Ipswich High School.

Jane Carmelita Herrmann of Gloucester High School,

Elizabeth Davis McKinnon of Manchester-Essex Regional High School.

Ella Katherine Silver of

Rockport High School, who also won the DAR's essay contest.

Also recognized were: **Eleanor Connolly** of Gloucester High School who received the Cape Ann Chapter's DAR JROTC medal and certificate for her outstanding leadership and academic achievements, as attested to by the JROTC unit's leaders at Gloucester High, as well as demonstrating loyalty and patriotism.

Leah Smullin of Triton Regional High School who received the chapter's Outstanding Sea Cadet award and certificate for her outstanding leadership and academic achievements.

The Cape Ann Chapter DAR sponsors Gloucester, Rockport, Manchester Essex Regional, Hamilton-Wenham Regional, Ipswich and Triton Regional High Schools in Massachusetts. Each school may select one high school senior a year who then becomes that



Gloucester Mayor Greg Verga, far left, and local high school students, from second from left, Ella Katherine Silver, Elizabeth Davis McKinnon, Emily Eve Hannibal, Jane Carmelita Herrmann, Martin Emerson Baum, Leah Smullin, and Eleanor Connolly, who were honored by the Daughters of the American Revolution Cape Ann Chapter.

COURTESY PHOTO

school's Good Citizen.

The chapter honored the students at a ceremony Dec. 7 at Gloucester City Hall.

The DAR, founded in 1890 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a non-profit, non-political

volunteer women's service organization dedicated to promoting patriotism, preserving American history,

and securing America's future through better education for children.

GHS student wins MASS Award for academic excellence

By **Ethan Forman**

» Staff Writer

Jane Herrmann, a co-treasurer of the Gloucester High School Student Advisory Council, was awarded a Certificate of Academic Excellence from the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents by Superintendent Ben Lummis.

Herrmann had just updated the School Committee during its Jan. 8 meeting about various events in the schools when Lummis said Herrmann had won the award.

The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents' Certificate of Academic Excellence is given to a high school student in each district "who distinguish themselves in the pursuit of excellence during their high school careers."

"You certainly exemplify that," Lummis told Herrmann.

"So, we know you are looking at a number of excellent schools for next year. And we wish you luck for the rest of the school year," Lummis said, "obviously, and all the things you are doing, and I also wish you luck figuring out what's next after you cross that graduation stage here in the stadium in June."

Among her many achievements in school, Herrmann received the College Women's Club of Cape Ann Award, according to the school district. She also received the Sawyer Medal in the eighth grade, and is a member of the National Honors Society. She serves as a captain of the GHS Swim and Dive Team. She received the Smith Book Award in her junior year and is an AP Scholar.

Ethan Forman may be contacted at 978-675-2714, or at eforman@northof-boston.com.



Gloucester High School senior Jane Herrmann was recently awarded a Certificate of Academic Excellence from the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents by Gloucester Superintendent Ben Lummis.

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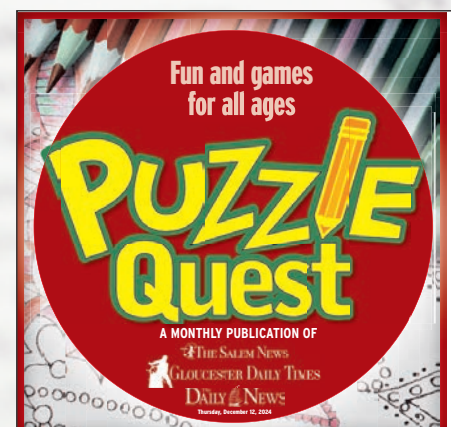
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'CHICAGO'

Teen Edition' showcases efforts of CTE students, artists

By News Staff

SALEM — ONSTAGE, the Salem High School Drama Club, recently performed "Chicago: Teen Edition", adapted from John Kander and Fred Ebbs' legendary award-winning musical about fame, fortune, and acquittal. The musical ran Jan. 17-19.

"Chicago: Teen Edition" takes place in the Roaring Twenties, where chorus girl Roxie Hart murders a faithless lover and convinces her hapless husband, Amos, to take the rap until he finds out he's been duped and turns on Roxie. Convicted and sent to death row, Roxie and another merry murderess Velma Kelly, vie for the spotlight and the headlines, ultimately joining forces in search of the American Dream: fame, fortune, and acquittal.

The Salem High production featured original choreography by local choreographer Lemar Archer and text that was adapted to be appropriate for audiences pre-teen and older.

Among the unique things about theater is the wide variety of skills, experience, and techniques needed to mount a production. At Salem High, where students can choose from a host of electives and extracurriculars in visual and performing arts, as well as a robust and growing Career and Technical Education program, the annual musical is an opportunity to apply classroom learning to real-world problems and hone skills needed for future careers and study.

For "Chicago: Teen Edition", Salem High Building & Property Maintenance students helped measure and cut lumber used to



Students rehearse for "Chicago: Teen Edition".

LEAH HAMILTON FRENCH/Courtesy photos



Frances Jones, left, and Em Clark, right, star as Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly in "Chicago: Teen Edition".

build the set, while students in the Graphic Design

track designed poster artwork as part of a classroom



TROY PURINGTON/Courtesy photo

From left, technical theatre student Elizabeth Lancaster works with CTE carpentry students Mason Potorski and Daniel Alley to cut materials for set construction.

assignment. Music students played in the pit band and sang onstage, while students

from the Art Honor Society and the Technical Theater class assisted with

designing the set, lights, and costumes, and creating props.

"It's really cool to point to set pieces onstage and say, 'Hey, I made that,'" said Daniel Alley, a third-year carpentry student and the production's Student Technical Director. "Working on building the set is an opportunity to apply my carpentry skills in artistic ways that also support my interests as a musician."

Alley, a trumpet player, also plays in the Salem High Jazz Ensemble and Marching Band.

"As an educator, I feel strongly that it is important to let students into the process of creative decision-making and leadership," said Salem High theater director and teacher Leah Hamilton French. "Not only does this provide valuable learning experiences, but it is also a necessity. It would be impossible for one person, or even several people, to do all the work that goes into a staged musical production. When students are asked to help, they rise to the occasion spectacularly and feel a great sense of pride in that."

That collaborative spirit was seen in the choreography of the show. Much of it was created by Archer, but there were several pieces students worked together to choreograph.

"Being a dance captain in 'Chicago' is a very fun opportunity," said sophomore Rose Shanahan. "The role did come with a lot of responsibility during the rehearsal process, but seeing the dances I choreographed and taught being brought to life by my peers was a wonderful experience, and helped me grow a lot as a dancer and instructor."

KEEPING UP THE PACE

Peabody/Essex Tech's Karley O'Connor swims in the girls 100 meter breaststroke at the Lester O. Sterling Branch YMCA in Beverly, Jan. 25, during the NEC championship meet.

TIM CARDEW/Photo



School choice-out numbers drop in Gloucester

By Ethan Forman

» Staff Writer

GLOUCESTER — Fewer students are choosing to leave Gloucester Public Schools for classrooms in Rockport and other North Shore school districts, Superintendent Ben Lummis told the School Committee last month.

Lummis, speaking about the school choice program, said 215 students who live in Gloucester go to school elsewhere, which is down 23 students or nearly 10% from the prior school year.

School choice out to other districts is down nearly 30% since 305 Gloucester students attended school elsewhere in fiscal 2018.

However, the latest school choice enrollment numbers show far more Gloucester students go to school outside the district than kids from outside Gloucester attend schools in America's oldest seaport.

The school choice numbers do not include enrollment at the Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School in Danvers, private or parochial schools, or those who are being home schooled.

Under the state's inter-district school choice program, families can enroll their children in schools in communities other than the one in which they live.

Tuition is paid by the sending district to the receiving district, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website. The preliminary regular day school choice tuition rate for fiscal 2025 is \$5,000 for school districts and \$9,727 for Commonwealth virtual schools, plus an additional \$75 per student administrative fee.

Where they go

Lummis gave the School Committee a snapshot of

"school choice out" over the last nine fiscal years.

"You can see the trend is consistently downward the last few years," he said.

The most recent high came in fiscal 2018 with 305 students choosing to choice out, with numbers tapering off since.

There were 292 school choice out students in fiscal 2019, 278 students in fiscal 2020, 266 in fiscal 2021, 252 in fiscal 2022, 255 in fiscal 2023 and 238 students in the last school year.

"It's progress, real progress," Lummis said.

As to where the students are going, Rockport has always had the highest school choice enrollment from Gloucester, Lummis said, with 145 students from Gloucester attending school in the neighboring Cape Ann district this year.

Another 30 Gloucester students are attending Manchester Essex Regional School District, 14 are going

to school in Beverly, 14 are attending statewide virtual schools, three students each are attending Peabody, Hamilton-Wenham and Ipswich, and one each are attending school in Winthrop, at Masconomet Regional and in Salem.

There is progress just looking at school choice numbers to Rockport with 235 students from Gloucester choosing to go to Rockport in fiscal 2018 and 2019 and 145 doing so this year, a drop of 90 students or a 38% decrease since then, Lummis said.

An earlier report showed that enrollment in the district has stayed steady, which to the superintendent showed "that more students of choice are choosing to stay in Gloucester," he said.

While the number of school choice out students has been steadily dropping, Gloucester's enrollment has stayed steady and averaged 2,830 students in the past

four fiscal years, according to data in DESE's School and District Profiles online.

Choosing Gloucester

Forty students from outside the seaport attend city schools across all grade levels, with the majority, 20 students, attending Gloucester High. Another nine attend O'Maley Innovation Middle School, six attend East Veterans Elementary School, two each attend Bee-man and Plum Cove Elementary Schools, and one attends West Parish Elementary School.

It makes sense most students would be part of school choice at Gloucester High given it is the largest school in the district and there is typically more movement at the high school level, Lummis said.

Rockport has the largest number of "choice in" students at 28, followed by a smattering of students from across the North

Shore, he said, with two each attending from Beverly, Peabody, Lynn and Essex, and one each from Ipswich, Danvers, Saugus and Wenham.

Part of the reason why students attend Gloucester schools from other cities and towns has to do with having family here, or they were enrolled in the schools before, or their parents work locally, or they are children of staff, Lummis said.

Enrollment at Essex Tech has stayed consistent over the past decade at between 98 to 107 Gloucester students.

The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has advised the district it must revise its school choice policy. Admission criteria cannot include a review of attendance or a student disciplinary record, he said.

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One-timers with ... Jaydan Vargas of Essex Tech

Editor's Note: *One-Timers, a Q-and-A with a local boys high school hockey player, returns for its 11th season.*

Name: Jaydan Vargas

Age: 18

Height: 5-foot-8

Weight: 140 lbs.

High school: Essex Tech

Hometown: Peabody

Year in school: Senior

Position: Right wing

What type of skates, stick and helmet do you use?: For skates I use CCM JetSpeed FT4Pros, a Bauer Re-Akt 95 for my helmet, and a Bauer Nexus Tracer stick with a P92 curve and 72 flex.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?: It would have to be 'Elf'. I like the jokes throughout the movie and its outrageous story. It's one of those movies I could never get sick of.

What's the best hockey-related gift you ever received for Christmas?: I'd have to be an E-Z Ice rink. It's a 20-by-40 outdoor rink setup I got when I was nine, and it's awesome. It's super easy to set up, and I would always be on it with my buddies. This year I'm hoping I can get some tickets to a Bruins game.

If you were going to be college roommates with one of your teammates, who would you want it to be?: My liney, Anthony Bisenti. We've been great friends since the fifth grade, and I sit next to him in the locker room. He's pretty organized, always cracking jokes, never serious, and is just a great presence to have around. He's very, very loud tough.

What's your opinion of Taylor Swift?: I don't really care all that much about Taylor Swift. I wouldn't go see her in concert or anything — but will say she does have a few spots in our postgame playlist.

You and the other three team captains are all from Peabody and have grown up playing together since you were little. Talk about the bond that

you four guys share: It's awesome how it worked out that way. Brady (Leonard), Mason (Sutcliffe) and Andrew (Bisenti) are my best friends. They've been playing together since they started hockey and I joined when I was 9 or 10, so we've had a lot of time to build up chemistry and really strong bonds. We've shared countless fun memories, going on a bunch of tournaments together, and having a lot of hangouts and sleepovers only brought us closer. I feel I can say that these are my lifelong friends. The bond that we all share is special and will only continue to grow.

What changes do you think the Patriots should make when the season is over?: They need a better offensive line and a legit receiver for Drake Maye.

What is your field of study at Essex Tech?: I study plumbing. I'm hoping to get into the plumber's union next year.

What's the best TikTok video or Instagram reel you've watched lately?: It'd have to be a reel I saw yesterday of (Minnesota Wild goaltender) Marc-Andre Fleury, but it was a lot of off-ice moments and not in-game. It had all his pranks in it, and I found it pretty funny.

Lastly, what can Essex Tech do this season to win the Cape Ann League title and make a run at the Division 3 state title?: We have a really strong team that is fast, physical and experienced. Coach (Mark) Leonard has us players ready to step up, as we are expected to when the time comes. If we want to go deep, though, we have got to be sure we are playing a hard and full 45 minutes. We can't come out slow, ease up, or overlook any team because we've already learned what happens when you do. As players, we have to be ready to work hard, show up every day, and compete no matter what, and as a captain I will be sure to put the team on that track and be ready to make a run.

— As told to Phil Stacey



Essex Tech captain Jaydan Vargas.

NICOLE GOODHUYE BOYD PHOTO

Push from Peabody helps pass school bus camera bill

By Caroline Enos

» Staff Writer

PEABODY — A bill passed on Beacon Hill last month will help put the brakes on school bus passing violations largely thanks to the work of advocates in Peabody.

The bill, H. 4940, legalizes the use of cameras on the outside of school buses to penalize drivers who illegally pass them while they are stopped to pick up or drop off students.

H. 4940 was signed by Gov. Maura Healey in early January. It was passed by the state's House of Representatives earlier last year and by the state's Senate in a final rush of bills pushed forward just before the end of the legislative session on Dec. 31.

The cameras only record footage outside of the bus — footage that can be used as evidence to catch drivers who pass school buses with their stop arms out and lights flashing — and allow police to more easily issue fines to offenders.

A district's school committee would need to vote in favor of installing school bus cameras under the bill and must pay for them. Images and video could only be obtained for purposes other than enforcement of failing to stop, or defending against such an allegation, by a court order, according to a Senate Ways and Means Committee summary of the bill.

This is a major win for citizens and elected officials in Peabody, where a concerned mother spurred a renewed interest in passing the law in 2022 more than a decade after it was first introduced.

"This really all came together once people realized the disturbing number of illegal school bus passing violations that are happening and endangering the lives of our students," said Maria Scheri, who is also an employee at North of Boston



JAIME CAMPOS/Staff file photos

Salem Mayor Dominick Pangallo takes a photograph of a school bus' surveillance cameras at Witchcraft Heights Elementary School in Salem as AAA Northeast, the city of Salem and other partners are teaming up to promote school transportation safety highlighting several new local initiatives to protect schoolchildren — including Salem's participation in a school bus camera pilot program.

Media Group and The Salem News.

Scheri decided to act after a mother and her young children were struck and seriously injured by a car while walking to school in Peabody in 2022. While the motorist hadn't illegally passed a school bus in the incident, reports of many near misses at local bus stops made her feel like this type of tragedy was inevitable.

Soon after, Scheri founded an initiative called S.T.O.P the Operator from Passing and became the co-chair of the Peabody School Safety Task Force she started with Mayor Ted Bettencourt and other Peabody law enforcement and school officials.

The task force works to educate students, parents and drivers about road safety; an initiative that will continue, she said.

Through this task force, Peabody became the first community in the state to run a pilot program of

stop-arm cameras through BusPatrol America LLC, a Virginia company that develops technology designed to keep school buses safe.

The city installed these cameras on 10 buses for the 2023-2024 school year and recorded more than 3,500 instances of drivers illegally passing school buses. Sometimes as students were still crossing the street, as shown in footage shared by the city.

Salem began its own stop-arm camera trial period with BusPatrol over the summer, making it the second Bay State community to do so. From Sept. 4 to Oct. 22, 11 school buses recorded 1,094 violations of vehicles passing them while the buses were stopped, BusPatrol reported.

"The data and video footage the cameras provided along with the support of local news, raised a tremendous amount of awareness which ignited a larger push to pass the bill from state



Maria Scheri, an advocate for surveillance cameras on school buses, chats with state Rep. Sally Kerans during a BusPatrol press conference at Higgins Middle School in Peabody in October 2023.

lawmakers, organizations such as AAA Northeast and other advocacy groups," Scheri said.

"It's amazing how one community can take a stand and lead the way to affect change for not just their own but for communities across the state," she continued. "Peabody and then Salem took a stand against dangerous driving behavior and I am hopeful other school districts will get on board."

State Sen. Joan Lovely, D-Salem, and state Reps. Tom Walsh, D-Peabody, and Sally Kerans, D-Danvers, threw their support behind the bill, as did other legislators around the state. This fall, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees also voted to support the bill following a similar endorsement by the Peabody School Committee.

"There are 7,000 bills filed every year, so it can be

a combination of great information, new urgency, that pushes a bill forward, which is what Maria's information did," Kerans said. "Her advocacy led to working with BusPatrol, getting that data, and that, I think, really changed the conversation and made it possible to get it across the finish line this year."

Walsh called the story of this bill "a great civics lesson." It will also save lives, Bettencourt said.

"This was outstanding news to receive at the end of the year as I truly believe this legislation will go a long way towards making transportation much safer for our students and their families," he said. "I am proud that Peabody was the lead community spearheading this effort and we had an amazing team led by Maria Scheri."

Material from the State House News Service was used in this report.

Contact Caroline Enos at CEnos@northofboston.com.

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