

Press Release – Date filled in by Chabad

Chabad of Westport – Westport, Connecticut

VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED SURVIVORS TO PARTICIPATE IN
PROGRAM TO COMMEMORATE THE 74th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ

The Passengers of the Jewish refugee ship, SS St Louis, will participate in a special program at the Chabad of Westport. The program will include the screening of the award winning documentary film COMPLICIT and will feature St. Louis surviving passengers Judith Steel, Sonja Geismar and Eva Wiener, who will participate in the post film Q & A led by the film's creator/producer Robert M. Krakow.

Turned away by the United States on June 6, 1939, while they were within sight of the palm trees of Miami Beach, these Jewish refugees of the SS St Louis made their way back to America, becoming exceptional citizens and making extraordinary contributions in medicine, science, law and human rights

After having been denied entry by Cuba, the ship carrying over 900 Jewish refugees escaping Nazi terror were denied safe haven by Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Their pleas to the Government of Canada and were again refused political asylum. Denying safe haven to these refugees by the United States sent the message to Hitler that Jews were expendable. The death of many of the passengers at the hands of Nazi terror was only the beginning of the Holocaust. The fact that political and diplomatic decisions have human rights implications is well known to surviving passengers Judith Steel, Sonja Geismar and Eva Wiener.



Cantor Judith Steel (Kew Gardens, NY) As a child, Steel evaded Nazi persecution in Germany when a French Catholic family took her into their home—an experience that informed her view that love does not always fit within the neat confines of religion. She was the cantor at the New Synagogue in Manhattan. Ms. Steel brings her exceptional music talents to the ceremony. She attended the 2009 70th Anniversary St. Louis passengers reunion in Miami Beach signed Senate Resolution 111 which was accepted into the Treasures Vault of the National Archives. Senate Resolution 111 was passed unanimously in May, 2009 and acknowledged the importance of learning the lessons of the saga of the St. Louis.



Sonja Geismar - Bronx, NY: In May 1939, Sonja's parents, paternal grandparents, two great aunts, and another great aunt with her husband were passengers on the St. Louis.. In Havana harbor she remembers the tenders and waving to cousins who came to see their grandparents who unfortunately went to Belgium and met their fate in a gas chamber. They went to England and when their quota numbers were reached they sailed into New York harbor on February 11, 1940 and the Statue of Liberty came into view. Sonja became a high school social studies teacher. Years later she changed the direction of my career by returning to graduate school for her second Masters degree. She became a high school librarian in an inner city school and after ten years became head librarian



Eva Wiener, Neptune, NJ Eva Rose (Safier) Wiener was born in Berlin, Germany during the rise of Hitler. To escape the Nazis, her parents were able to book passage on the St. Louis, for its ill-fated voyage to Havana, Cuba. When the ship was forced to return its passengers to Europe, Eva and her parents were among the fortunate ones to be accepted into the quota for England. They immigrated to the United States in May of 1946. Eva was employed as a Budget Analyst at Fort Monmouth, an installation of the U. S. Department of Defense. While at the Fort she was instrumental in establishing a yearly program commemorating the Holocaust. This program grew to become the most successful program of its kind for a military installation. She has been Past President of the Monmouth County Chapter of B'nai Brith Women and the Gibor Zimel Resnick Chapter of American Friends of Magen David Adom. In November of 2006 Eva was honored by being the recipient of the Eishet Chayil (Woman of Valor) awarded by the Central New Jersey Women's Branch for Conservative Judaism. In 2012 Eva was selected by her synagogue as the Woman of the Year. In May of 2012 Eva also received a "Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition" for "invaluable service to the community" presented to her by Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr.