

# Quebec teachers learn abo

By JANICE ARNOLD  
Staff Reporter

Karine Lajeunesse is a 27-year-old francophone "de souche" who grew up in Grand-Mère, a picturesque but economically depressed pulp-and-paper town in Quebec's Mauricie heartland.

Ethnic conflict and racial hatred, let alone the Holocaust, were concepts that never intruded on her world.

So how did she end up spending three weeks this July at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem taking an intensive course on how and why six million Jews were annihilated, taught by some of the leading scholars in the field?

And why will she be creating a unit on the Nazi genocide and the danger of anti-Semitism and teaching it to her culturally diverse Rosemount High School students?

Lajeunesse was one of three Montreal-area public school teachers selected for a scholarship sponsored by Riva and Thomas Hecht to attend Yad Vashem's summer seminar for educators from abroad, held at its International School for Holocaust Studies.

The program aims to strengthen the teaching of the Holocaust at non-Jewish schools around the world.

The scholarship covered not only the tuition, but also airfare, food and lodging, and field trips around Israel.

When Lajeunesse received information from her English Montreal School Board (EMSB) about the scholarship program, she didn't hesitate to apply.

Lajeunesse teaches French as a second language, and her Secondary V students had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* in translation. "Students were asking me a lot of questions about the Holocaust, and I realized I didn't know much about it," she said.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide has also been on the minds of the young people in her classroom, and she saw the potential for drawing a lesson from what happened during World War II.

Lajeunesse, and this year's two other recipients, Evelyn Howard who teaches a course called "The Consequences of War" as part of the language-arts curriculum at Thornblade School in Pierrefonds, and Adrienne Sholzberg, who taught ethics at Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School last year and has returned to Concordia University for a master's degree, spoke about their experiences, during a luncheon hosted by the Hechts to announce new directions for the scholarship program. The latter two schools are part of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB).

The teachers had classes from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. six days a week, and other activities most evenings. Their fellow teachers came mainly from the United States and Canada, but also from Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania and Serbia, among other countries.

"The lessons that I had were very useful and interesting. Some moments were intense — when we met with a survivor of the Holocaust, for example," Lajeunesse said. "It was an emotional experience as well because I was always thinking about the Holocaust during the three weeks."

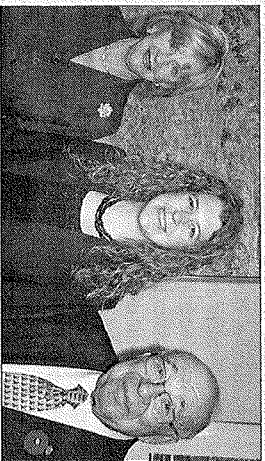
In addition to gaining a historical understanding, she appreciated the concrete ideas on how to integrate the Holocaust into a curriculum.

The Riva and Thomas O. Hecht Scholarship Program was established by the couple in 2005 to enable interested teachers in the Quebec public school system to attend the Yad Vashem seminar.

"This year we received many applications of a very high calibre... This made the task of selecting only three candidates to go to Israel an onerous one," said Riva. Those chosen are offered orientation and followup from the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and Bronfman Jewish Education Centre.

The Holocaust is not a standard part of the provincial curriculum, and whether and how the subject is touched on is generally left to individual teachers, although both the EMSB and LBPSB encourage its inclusion.

Riva is a Montreal-born adult education professor at Concordia University. Tom, who was born in Czechoslovakia in 1929, spent more than two years of his childhood on the run across



Rosemount High School teacher Karine Lajeunesse, centre, is seen with Riva and Thomas Hecht, sponsors of a scholarship program enabling Quebec public school teachers to attend Yad Vashem's international seminars.

a graduate of the now-closed downtown High School of Montreal.

The Hechts hope more school boards throughout the province will encourage their teachers to apply in the future. At the luncheon, the scholarship program's new website, designed by husband and-wife team Leo Huberman and Ruth Rotermans, was unveiled. The site is at [www.t-h-e.org](http://www.t-h-e.org).

In addition to information on the program there is space for teachers to share their experiences and ideas about teaching the Holocaust, as well as links to useful resources.

Scholarship recipients are expected to create at least one teaching unit or module inspired by what they learned at Yad Vashem. It may be integrated into courses as diverse as history, language or the arts. They also take part in at least one other activity during the school year, such as speaking publicly or making a presentation at a conference.

In second term, Lajeunesse will ask her senior students to research a specific topic related to the Holocaust and then present it to her younger Secondary II class. The younger students are reading *Hana's Suitcase*, about another young Jewish girl who died at Auschwitz. She hopes this will lead to reflection on contemporary racism.

The three recipients, plus the two from last year, will hold a workshop titled "Teaching To Erase," at a province-wide teachers' convention taking place at the end of November.

All material created by the teachers is deposited at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, the EMSB and the LBPSB for use by other teachers. Tom believes Holocaust education is more important today than ever. "It is absolutely essential in a society that is sending danger signals of self-

Europe as his family

desperately sought

refuge from the Nazis

They finally arrived in

Montreal on Jan. 1

1942, some of the very

few Jews admitted to

Canada during the war

Hecht, who would

go on to financial

success in the pharmaceutical industry and

hold numerous posts in the Jewish community; is a product of the

public school system