

ADL Austin

Enriching community with education, law enforcement programs

By **Tonya Cone**

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Ray Maislin clearly remembers what it was like to live in post-Depression era New York, a time when discrimination in employment and college admittance was so rampant and widely accepted that his brother changed his major from civil engineering to accounting because his college told him they had not been able to place a Jewish civil engineer in a job in years.

"It was a waste," Maislin said of his brother's experience. "He became an IRS agent instead of building tunnels."

When Maislin and his wife, Audrey, moved to Houston in 1950, they took an active leadership role in fighting discrimination with the Anti-Defamation League, which at that time was a branch of B'nai B'rith.

Ray Maislin served as chair of the ADL Southwest Region for two years and as the ADL national commissioner. He is a life member of the group, which was founded in 1913 to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all citizens.

"When ADL came and I could fight back, that was an area that was at the top of my 'to do' list," he said.

The ADL, Maislin explained, was instrumental in helping Jewish people break into fields such as law, banking and the oil industry, from which they previously had been excluded.

When the Maislins moved to Austin in 1990, the ADL did not have a presence in the city, other than holding an occasional dinner here. The couple observed that, as hate crimes continue, and as the state capital and home to several universities, Austin needed an ADL office.

Along with a few other organizers, the Maislins raised seed money to convince organization administrators that the office would be able to support itself financially, despite the small size of the city.

UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

Also, Cathy Schechter came up with the idea to establish a unique partnership with the Jewish Community Association of Austin's Community Relations Council so that the two organizations could share resources, including office space and staff, to make an ADL Austin office feasible.

Their persistence and efforts paid off. In 2003, an Austin satellite office under the Southwest Region ADL office in Houston opened with one part-time staff member.

Since its inception, ADL Austin has

grown. It is now open full-time and employs three staff members. Roberta Clark, Austin community director, explained that ADL works to fight discrimination, bigotry and prejudice proactively, with educational programs, and reactively, with law enforcement officials in response to incidents.

"We're hate experts," Clark said.

ADL offers educational programs designed for preschools through the boardroom, Clark explained, as an attempt to stop the seeds of hatred before they take root.

Through the No Place for Hate program, an ADL coordinator works with schools to create an environment where diversity is embraced and hatred is neither accepted nor tolerated. To receive No Place for Hate designation, a school's members sign a "Resolution of Respect" (a pledge to combat prejudice), the school creates a coalition to oversee the implementation of

programs and projects, and the school completes at least three activities. Once a school completes the requirements and reports its progress to the ADL, it is certified as a No Place for Hate school and presented with a banner that can be hung publicly as a visual reminder that it is an anti-bias environment.

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Shelly Hohmann, principal of Kathy Caraway Elementary in Round Rock Independent School District, said the No Place for Hate program was a natural fit for her school.

"We knew we did so many things like this already, we thought it would be interesting to participate in something that brought it all under one umbrella," Hohmann said.

One of the activities her school has adopted is an international bazaar that celebrates diversity by spotlighting elements of different nations, such as customs, food, traditions and sports heroes. Her school also is fighting on anti-bullying by teaching how bullying takes various forms in vicious things children say, cyber-bullying (considered a serious middle school issue) and rumors. The program teaches that bystanders can help prevent bullying and that silence is seen as complicit bullying.

"It teaches them how to stand up for themselves and other children," Hohmann said.

The biggest change in the school since enrolling in ADL's program has been the involvement of the student coalition, Hohmann said. Made up of third through fifth graders, the coalition has been a great resource for building leadership capacity

in the students.

"I think we already had a school where students are respectful and parents teach them how to behave before coming to school," she said. "It is a compliment to our school and the way children behaved before."

Megan Flowers, Austin's No Place for Hate coordinator, said the ADL program has been really successful in area schools since a grant was awarded to support a full-time staff person to focus on promoting the program. While around 14 schools were enrolled in the program last year, today 76 schools are working toward No Place for Hate designation.

The ADL also provides educators with resources appropriate for different grade levels, such as curriculum guides and activity ideas, books and materials for preschool age children and guides on addressing religion in public schools, and ADL Austin responds to incidents that occur at schools, such as a recent stabbing at an area middle school and when hateful words were painted on the Lamar Middle School marquee in February.

The ADL offers educational programs for adults as well. In general, the ADL offers adults information on topics such as advocating for Israel and serves as a resource for those whose civil rights are violated in the workplace and elsewhere. ADL Austin also sponsored the Light/Holocaust Professional Development Institute at the end of February, attended by 65 educators from 30 schools. The conference aimed to increase attendees' content knowledge on the Holocaust and genocide and to improve teaching strategies for those topics.

GLASS LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

ADL Austin has also implemented the Glass Leadership Institute, a program that introduces the ADL and information about confronting and combating anti-Semitism, hatred and prejudice to leaders so participants can serve as advocates in the community. Dana Epstein, assistant director of the Community Relations Council and ADL Austin, said the program seeks to inspire leaders so they will share information with others in the community and become more involved with ADL as supporters and ambassadors.

Despite ADL's proactive work, hate crimes and incidents continue to occur, so the organization works reactively as a resource for law enforcement staff.

"We want them to be safe and we want to help them get the bad guys," Clark said, explaining that ADL Austin works with area law enforcement professionals to help catch perpetrators of hate crimes as well as to support and assist victims in working with the police and media.

In addition to providing hate crime, extremism and anti-bias training for law enforcement professionals, ADL Austin works with law enforcement staff to



Ray and Audrey Maislin, among others, raised seed money to convince ADL that Austin could support a local office of the organization. 'When you have as diverse a population as the United States has,' he said, 'ADL programs can benefit all if it is brought into the mainstream.'



investigate hate crimes by monitoring extremist and terrorist groups, including their online activity, which is a growing concern. The ADL provides officials with information on symbols that hate groups and other extremists use, as well as criminal activities.

Capt. Bill Fulton of the Texas Department of Public Safety recently attended an ADL advanced training session in Washington, D.C., which he said was a rare opportunity to share ideas with other upper management in his field. He frequently works closely with ADL Austin, which he described as invaluable resource.

"The information in their database is available to our analysts when trying to identify someone in a group," Fulton said. "They have a tremendous database that our analysts use to help field personnel when investigating."

He described how recently, when working on an incident involving a domestic crime group, ADL provided information that DPS could not find anywhere else on several individuals his office was trying to identify.

Ray and Audrey Maislin said that the benefits of the ADL Austin's work are something they hope to pass on to their children, grandchildren and future generations, and that it does not just benefit the Jewish people.

"When you have as diverse a population as the United States has, ADL programs can benefit all if it is brought into the mainstream," he said. "Progress has been made for all, and everything is for the good of all Americans."

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