

WOHS students experience living history with DOI resident

This is the first year that Daughters of Israel senior resident Sandye Garrison has participated in the Jewish Historical Society of New Jersey Intergenerational Oral History Program. Garrison remembers spending time with her grandmother and getting invaluable advice from her about life. She is happy that she can give back by partnering with two West Orange High School freshmen students who during four field trips interviewed Garrison about her life.

“I hope to be able to share my own unique life experiences to help these girls make their own life decisions,” she said.

One of the topics of discussion that program participants engage in is confronting stereotypes. A question posed to senior residents based on this topic is: “Have you ever been discriminated against regarding your age, sex, education level, race, religion?” Garrison’s life story is unique in the sense that she crafted her own career and did it on her terms.

Garrison was enrolled in Mt. Sinai Nursing School when she was “discovered” while dancing the tango at the Brooklyn JCC. A casting agent approached her and mentioned that he needed to cast a movie, “Around the World in 80 Days.” He asked her to help since she told him that she was from Brooklyn and knew a lot of people. She also met Huntington Hartford, owner of the A&P supermarket chain, who sug-



Photo Courtesy of Mali Schwartz

Daughters of Israel resident Sandye Garrison tells her personal history to two West Orange High School students as part of the Jewish Historical Society of New Jersey Intergenerational Oral History Program.

gested that she was a natural and that she should try her hand at being a casting agent. She agreed and never looked back.

During her 30-year career in show business, Garrison raised her four children as a single mother in Manhattan and traveled to Hollywood on a monthly basis. She worked

with distinguished directors and producers such as Stanley Jaffe, who became president of Paramount Pictures. Garrison became the casting director and liaison between “The Godfather” and the production company. She has worked with Francis Ford Coppola as well as William Friedkin, and discovered

Al Pacino, Robert DeNiro and Ali McGraw.

One of her proudest accomplishments is her charitable work. In 2004, Garrison was presented with an award for her volunteer work with Women of Tomorrow, a mentoring and scholarship program for at-risk young women. She promoted the program at colleges and businesses and was able to raise considerable funds for scholarships.

Giving back is something that is not only Garrison’s dream but a measurable goal. Prior to Daughters of Israel, Garrison resided at the Jewish Community Housing Corp apartments, where she created the first resident council leadership conference, launched Bubbe’s Bazaar to benefit the Tenants Association, arranged the showing of three movies a week, and organized an Oscar night for 10 years, which she then introduced to the Daughters of Israel. Awards were presented to every resident of the Laurie Pavilion, where Garrison resides. The red carpet was rolled out and her goal of making everyone feel special was achieved as Garrison emceed, regaling her audience with charm and wit. Always thinking of different ways to combine her career in movies with her current audience, Garrison shared several other projects, such as having a Playbill evening where residents dress up as a particular Broadway character and staging a Cabaret Night, at which talented residents and staff will perform.