

## Not all WWII detainees in San Mateo were Japanese

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By Suzanne Bohan, STAFF WRITER.

SAN MATEO — Six decades of hidden anger and pain will go public this weekend at the largest gathering yet to publicize the World War II incarceration in the U.S. of almost 15,000 residents with ties to Germany and Italy.

While the forced detention during World War II of Japanese living in the United States is now widely known, neglected on the pages of history books is the imprisonment in the 1940s of thousands of Germans and Italians living in America in bleak camps in California, North Dakota and Texas, among other states.

Today, men and women who as children lived in the camps, or whose fathers were incarcerated there, will gather in San Mateo to launch a fresh bid to move this forgotten chapter in U.S. history from obscurity and onto the stage of public debate.

"Americans needs to decide what they think about this program," said Karen Ebel, a conference panelist and daughter of 87-year-old Max Ebel, a German American interned at age 22. "This happened to European people, and it can happen to just about anyone, depending the circumstances in the world."

The three-hour conference, funded with a \$10,000 state grant, is called "The Hidden Stories of World War II." It opens with poignant testimonials about the camps from the six panelists, five with direct experience of the camps.

The conference is free and open to the public. It will be from 1 to 4 p.m. today at the San Mateo Public Library, 55 W. Third. Ave., San Mateo. Call (650)522-7800.

Performances of the "Freedom Lost" plays, which are also free, begin at 7:30 p.m. today in the Little Theater at Hillsdale High School, 3115 Del Monte St., San Mateo. Call (650) 522-7800 for information on the conference and (650) 558-2699 for information about the plays.

Linking that 1940s social upheaval with current times, panelists will discuss what they view as history repeating itself with treatment of U.S. residents of Arabian descent, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In a gallery at the new library, the "The Enemy Alien Files" photo exhibit also opens today, where it will remain through May. The roughly 100 photos comprising the exhibit, along with their accompanying narratives, portray life at the detention camps.

"Someone has described it as 'historically dense,'" said John Christgau, a

conference organizer and author of the first book on U.S. residents of German and Italian ancestry incarcerated as "dangerous enemy aliens" during World War II.

The photo exhibit has toured numerous cities, including Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, Boston and Washington, D.C., Christgau said.

The day's events will end with the presentation of three new short plays, called "Freedom Lost," written by Christgau.

One play, called "Zip," is named after the lead character, a teenage boy in Cincinnati left to fend for himself after his parents were detained as "enemy aliens." Then the boy's participation in a parade as a 12-year-old dooms his dreams of a career in baseball after federal officials incarcerate him as well.

Another play, "The White Line," portrays the confusion, fear and anger among Italian fishermen in Santa Cruz one day in 1942, as the Coast Guard seized their fishing boats and forbade them from crossing a "white line." The line was drawn to keep the fishermen from reaching the coast, where officials feared they might send signals to enemy boats or submarines.

"The Master Tailor's Wife" narrates an afternoon in a Japanese tailor's shop in Peru, during which Peruvian officers, at the behest of U.S. officials, arrest and prepare for deportation to the United States a Japanese tailor suspected, on spurious evidence, of sewing commando uniforms for Japanese soldiers.

"We want to give them a one-two punch," said Christgau.

While the conference provides testimonials and background on the World War II enemy alien program, he said, the plays convey the human toll of the long-ago events.

"Drama is the instrument by which we can take this history to a new level of understanding," Christgau said.

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