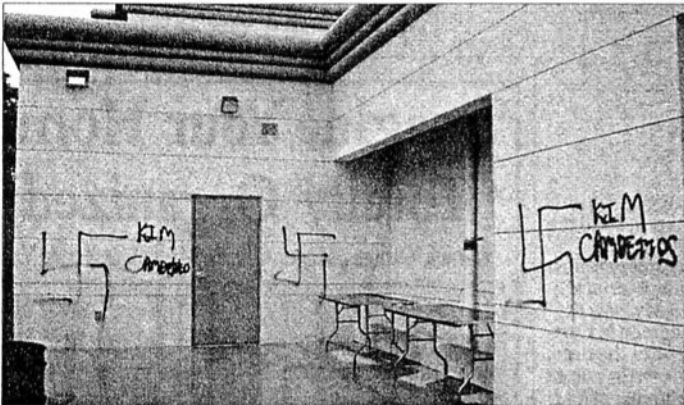


From hatred to harmony



VANDALISM: Swastikas were painted on the back of Chabad Lubavitch Jewish Temple over the July Fourth weekend. At top, under the watch of Rabbi Avraham Friedman, artist David Schluss, of Deerfield Beach, converts the swastikas into a mural. Once the outline is complete, the community has been invited to paint the new scene in a show of solidarity. Staff photos/Lou Toman

Artist transforms graffiti on Springs temple into mural.

BY SUSANNAH BRYAN
STAFF WRITER

CORAL SPRINGS • A symbol of hate will become one of hope when an Israeli artist transforms a vandal's swastikas on a temple wall into a work of art.

Over the July Fourth weekend, vandals painted four swastikas on the back wall of Chabad Lubavitch, where former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke in June. The week before, someone smashed the temple's windows with rocks.

Many temples simply paint over graffiti. But after getting several offers of help from the community, temple leaders chose to banish the markings with art that will bring

people together, Jewish or not. "The new mural will represent Jewish hope and faith and continuity," said Rabbi Avraham Friedman, director of the synagogue.

On Monday, artist David Schluss of Deerfield Beach began transforming the swastika graffiti, crude black markings on the northeast wall of the temple, into images of harmony, with figures dancing along the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

"I haven't heard of taking a swastika and painting it into something else," Robert L. Novak said from the Simon Wiesenthal Center's regional office in Hollywood. "Whether you paint over it or you create something else out of it, the idea is to get rid of it. We learned from the Holocaust that silence is not the answer — that to keep silent only encourages people to

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Artist transforms act of hate

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do these type of things.”

The Simon Wiesenthal Center, based in Los Angeles, is a human rights organization named after the famed Nazi war hunter.

“We don’t know if this temple was handpicked because Netanyahu spoke there or because Lubavitch is an Orthodox synagogue, but anti-Semitism has been waving its ugly head for years now,” Novak said.

The idea for the project was born out of a desire to spread harmony, Friedman said.

“We want to change this wall of terror to a wall of joy,” said Schluss, 59, a professional artist whose work is sold in Wentworth Galleries throughout the East Coast.

Once the outline is complete, the community is invited to paint the new scene in a show of solidarity. The

painting rally at the temple, at 3925 N. University Drive, will be at 11 a.m. on Sunday.

Temple members Gene and Rosaland Rice, who were shocked and saddened by the graffiti, plan to join in the painting ceremony.

“I think that’s a good idea to turn something ugly into something beautiful,” Gene Rice said Monday. “The vandals inadvertently ended up being the motivation for bringing the community together.”

The temple received several offers of help from people who heard about the incident, including a youth group that offered to paint over the graffiti and others who offered to help watch over the synagogue, Friedman said.

Schluss is donating his time and materials to help the temple, where a friend of his is a member. Schluss, who was born in Israel, has visited the Western Wall many times, his first at age three.

He estimates it will take

him two days to create the outline, which will contain images of the Western Wall, Judaism’s holiest site. Though he usually paints with his fingers using oil and acrylic, this new mission will require brushes and wall paint, he said. It will be his first mural on a concrete wall.

This is the first time the temple, which opened in March, has been vandalized. A congregant walking behind the temple on July 6 discovered the graffiti, temple officials said.

The hate crime is a third-degree felony that can bring a year in jail and \$1,000 fine.

Police are seeking help from the public in solving the case. Anyone with a tip as to who painted the graffiti can call the Coral Springs Police Department at 954-344-1800.

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