

**Bestowal ceremony of the “Bundesverdienstkreuz” (Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) on Dr. Arthur S. Obermayer
September 6, 2007 at Temple Shalom, Newton,**

Laudatio by Dr. Wolfgang Vorwerk, German Consul General

Arthur Obermayer, family members, guests, Shalom!

It is a distinct honor for me to present today on behalf of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German head of state, Horst Koehler, the "Order of Merit", "das Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande", the highest tribute the Federal Republic of Germany can pay to individuals, whether German or foreign, to you, Dr. Arthur Obermayer.

The President recognized your merits, Arthur, in fostering German-Jewish-American relations. You built bridges through your initiatives related to Germany. Your efforts had a significant impact in creating a deeper understanding between Germans and Americans, Non-Jews and Jews.

You have initiated as well as drawn attention to volunteer efforts of Germans, whose work ensures that the lives, culture and contributions of Jews in the history of their German communities will be honored and never forgotten.

Let me highlight your two main initiatives:

First: In the town of Creglingen in Southern Germany where Arthur's maternal grandparents were born Arthur initiated the founding of a Jewish museum in 1998.

With its widely acclaimed exhibition "Roots and Destination" the Jewish Museum shows the history of Jews in Creglingen and the area of Archshofen from the first settlements until emigration and deportation in the 30's and 40's - including the first anti-Jewish Programs of the Nazi era, just a few days after Hitler seized power which took place in Creglingen. Your uncle Rudolf Sinsheimer belonged to a group of 16 Jews violently abused during that attack by the police and the SA.

The Museum illustrates the causes and consequences of what started in 1933. Visitors are made aware of what we all lost through the Holocaust. However, visitors are also learning, as explained in the Museum, to build bridges from death to life, from curses to blessings, as written in the book Moses, so that you and your children may live.

Arthur, you initiated a truly joint effort. The founders of the Museum were locals and non-locals, Germans and Americans, Jews and Christians.

Arthur, you have initiated a project that has gained the attention of international experts – and again of Germans and Americans, Jews and Non-Jews - including well-known personalities such as the President of Brandeis University, Jehuda Reinharz. They all have expressed their support for the goals and objectives of this Museum and have been very helpful.

I have been asked by Hartmut Holzwarth, the Mayor of Creglingen, to extend the most sincere

congratulations not only from himself as Mayor of Creglingen and Chairman of the Jewish Museum Foundation, but also from the City Council and the entire City of Creglingen as well as the members of the board and the Advisory Board of the Jewish Museum Foundation.

Arthur Obermayer, it was not your only initiative to establish a Jewish Museum in Creglingen. You also established a German-Jewish History Award - the Arthur Obermayer German American History Award.

This award honors non-Jewish German citizens, private and local initiatives by volunteers, aimed at researching and preserving the rich and enriching Jewish history, culture and traditions in Germany and most notably the historical interrelation of Jews to Christians, their coexistence as friends, as neighbours, as associates and sometimes as adversaries.

The award links the past with the future by recognizing these Germans and their endeavors:

Awardees have included, as you mentioned earlier this year in your speech in Berlin, people:

- who had the local synagogue rebuilt and used for concerts, exhibits and lectures on Jewish topics
- who started a youth educational center adjacent to an old synagogue that he had restored in Mecklenburg
- who have inspired students for more than 25 years to research, record and publish Jewish history on local communities.
- who have taught how to make sure that what led up to the Holocaust, will never again to be allowed to take root and to flourish.

The awards is co-sponsored by Walter Momper the President of the Berlin House of Representatives which is the state legislature of Berlin.

The President of the Berlin House of Representatives, Walter Momper, asked me to extend his congratulations to you.

This award is presented in the Chamber of the Berlin House of Representatives in Berlin each year on January 27, which has been the Holocaust Memorial Day in Germany since 1996, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

The award is given this day in commemoration of the suffering of the Jews in Europe which was unparalleled, without comparison or precedent.

Your prize, Arthur, and those many hundreds of efforts in Germany by private and local initiatives which bear witness to the important role German and European Judaism played before World War II only demonstrate what was lost when Germany and Europe lost nearly all of its Jews. They left behind a gaping void that nobody will be able to close.

But you show us that history does not need to be a trap, but that it can be a bridge.

Arthur Obermayer, you are thus making a vitally important contribution to strengthening German-Jewish-American relations.

And I know that your wife, Judith, has always stood by your side. You emphasized on many occasions that she has been a tremendous support to you at all times. Actually a medal for both spouses ought to be created.

In recognizing your outstanding commitment to fostering German-Jewish-American relations and your contribution to German-American relations, it is a distinct honor and pleasure for me to bestow on behalf of the German Federal President this Order of Merit on you.

The Certificate, which I shall present now, reads as follows:

IN RECOGNITION OF THE SPECIAL CREDIT YOU DESERVE FOR YOUR SERVICE TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, I AWARD HEREBY HERRN DR. ARTHUR S. OBERMAYER WITH THE OFFICER'S CROSS OF THE ORDER OF MERIT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY. BERLIN, APRIL 13, 2007, THE FEDERAL PRESIDENT. SIGNED HORST KOEHLER.

The Cross of the Order of Merit is presented.

Congratulations.

And to all of you: Shana Tova umatukah. Wishing you and your loved ones happy healthy and sweet New Year. Happy holidays.

And I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Temple and Rabbi Eric Gurvis for their hospitality.