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Jewish Heritage Museum Open

Pataki, Clinton view access as symbol of humanity, rebirth

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STAFF WRITER

Nestled south of Battery Park City, unscathed by the attacks five blocks away, a distinctive little building with a grand view of the Statue of Liberty reopened on Friday. Gov. George Pataki and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) were among those speaking at the reopening of the Museum of Jewish Heritage.

"I could not imagine a better symbol for the rebirth of our city," Clinton said. She suggested more young people should come to the museum not only for a lesson in history but on "what we face today."

The governor said he was proud the museum stands as "a sign of humanity, a sign of renewal."

Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields said that after the turmoil of the past weeks, her "hope resurged" when she entered the museum, at One Battery Park Plaza.

The museum stands with "enduring symbols this country holds dear," such as the Statue of Liberty, said the museum's chairman, Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau. He said that it's important to reopen the museum now to show the human ability to rebuild, and that the continued construction plans for expanding the museum beginning Nov. 1 show resilience. He said the mission of the museum — education and remembrance — is particularly crucial now.

A few visitors came to learn and remember, meandering through the three floors of exhibits on Friday. Traffic from student groups is quiet during September and October, said Kenneth Goldsmith, the volunteer coordinator. (More than half of the groups come from public schools in the tristate area, and the rest from Catholic, Jewish and other private schools.)

Some of the museum staff witnessed the attacks, Goldsmith said. As they stood outside looking at the fire from the first attack, "the second plane flew right over our heads." But all 120 active volunteers asked when they could come back to work, Goldsmith said.



Photo by Jennifer S. Altman

Tourists view the exhibits Friday at the Museum of Jewish Heritage as it reopened for the first time since Sept. 11.

Goldsmith said the museum offers lessons appropriate for the circumstances. For example, the Holocaust exhibits focus on "the everyday men and women, who against all odds tried to live their lives," and the neighbors of different religions who helped them.

Visitors from around the world wandered through the museum. Michal Rybicki of Poland was glad to find the museum open. "It's a pity a lot of places are closed down," he said. Although after the attacks he wanted to drop his planned visit, his friends in New York said, "Don't give up."

Rybicki said the security measures in the United States are "not very professional" compared with Europe, where most museums and even domestic flights have tight security.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage has always had security checks since it opened in 1997, said museum spokeswoman Abby Spilka. "We've always taken security very seriously and continue to do so," she said.

The museum is open Sunday – Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and Friday and the eve of Jewish holidays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is $7 for adults and $5 for students and seniors.

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