"...to recognize and encourage acts of civil courage."

Wallenberg Day in Vancouver, on January 14, 2018

By Jan Nordin

The Wallenberg-Sugihara Civil Courage Society (WSCCS) was formed in Vancouver to continue the work of organizing the annual Raoul Wallenberg Day after its founder, the Swedish Consul in Vancouver Anders Neumüller, retired 2013 and moved back to Sweden.

Raoul Wallenberg was serving as Sweden's special envoy in Budapest between July and December 1944. He rescued thousands of Jews during the later stages of World War II. Wallenberg issued protective passports and sheltered Jews in buildings designated as Swedish territory. His actions put his own life at risk. Following the Soviet capture of Budapest on January 17 in 1945, Wallenberg disappeared. An annual Wallenberg Day is officially proclaimed in many countries, to take place on the Sunday closest to that date in January

Chiune Sugihara was a Japanese diplomat in Lithuania. During World War II, he helped thousands of Jews leave the country by issuing transit visas to refugees in direct violation of orders from the Japanese Government, thereby risking his career and his family's lives.

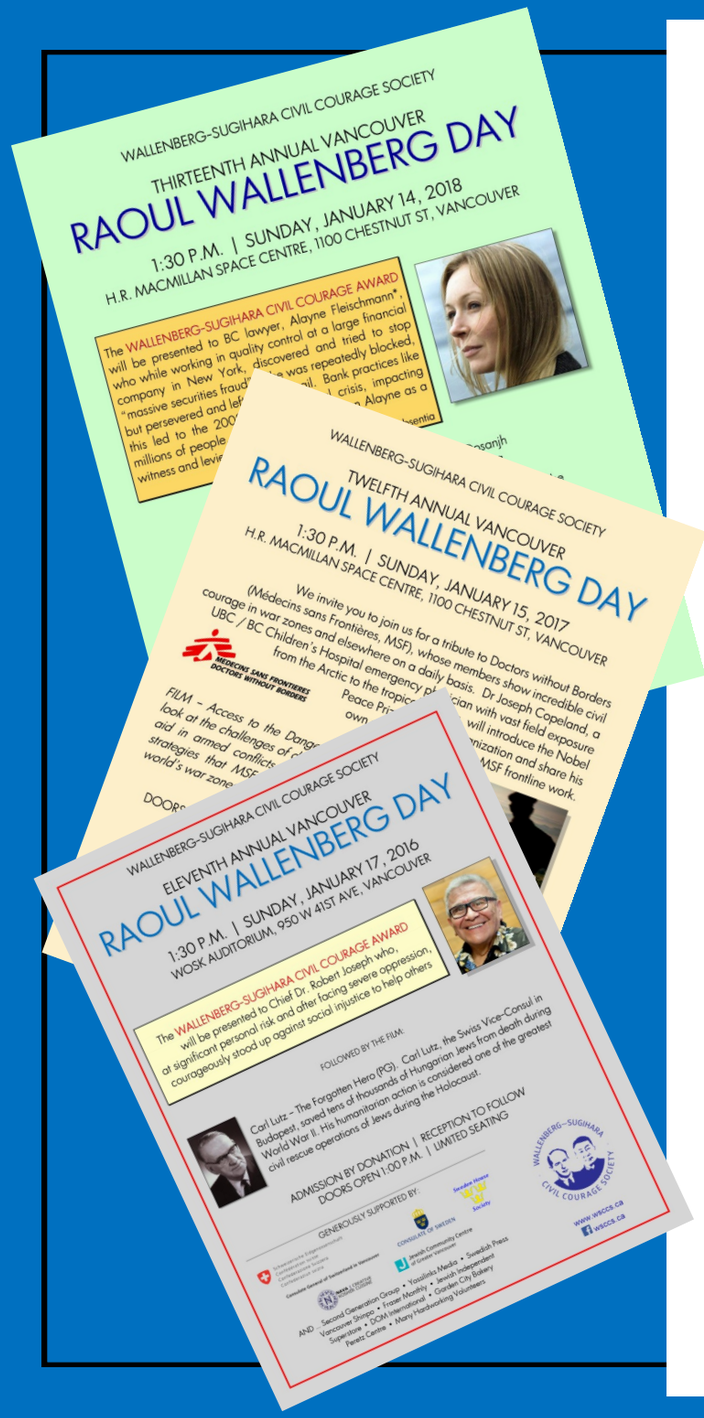
Initially when the Wallenberg Day started as an annual event in Vancouver 13 years ago, the program focused on showing movies about heroic actions to save Jewish victims during WWII. When WSCCS was formed to continue the Wallenberg Day, our focus expanded to also include and recognize current acts of civil courage.

For instance, in 2015 we gave an Award for Civil Courage in B.C. to the Honorable Ujjal Dosanjh, who received it for showing extraordinary courage in standing up against physical political violence in our community, and the following year to Chief Dr. Robert Joseph who received the Award for civil courage in moving a reconciliation process forward in our community.

The Wallenberg Day in Vancouver now pays tribute to courageous actions by people who are alive today and are engaged in selfless acts of civil courage, at grave risk to themselves, by choosing to follow their own personal moral code.

We need these stories to remind us of the inherent good that lives within people, and to inspire people today and future generations to act with courage and live their values, healing the world. We are passionate about the WSCCS, and its mission to recognize and encourage acts of civil courage.

We are seeking people who, at significant personal risk, have helped improve the lives of others by going against unjust laws or conventions. Go to www.wsccs.ca for more information.

The next Wallenberg Day, on January 14, 2018 will focus on whistle-blowing, and the courage it takes to expose wrongdoings. The Award-winner is a person who blew the whistle without budging on a large firm against its sharp and unethical practices to victimize thousands of customers.

Join the Wallenberg Day on January 14 at 1:30 pm at H.R. McMillan Space Centre, 1100 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, for keynote speakers on the subject of whistle-blowing and for the Award citation followed by a reception. Entrance is free, donations are welcome. See www.wsccs.ca for more information.