



**Mike Colle, M.P.P.**  
**Eglinton-Lawrence**  
**Backgrounder**

## **Jewish Heritage Month**

In the province of Ontario, Jewish Heritage Month is recognized in May of each year, by celebrating and honouring the heritage, culture, achievements and contributions made by members of the Jewish community in this province.

The “Jewish Heritage Month Act” (Bill 17) was passed unanimously in the Legislature on February 23, 2012. Jewish Heritage Month provides an opportunity to appreciate and learn about the history and culture of Ontarians of Jewish heritage who have made an impact in communities across the province, from Kenora to Cornwall. It also allows all Ontarians to share in acknowledging the significant contributions made by the Jewish community in the fields of medicine, law, politics, arts, business and philanthropy.

The Jewish Heritage Month Bill was spearheaded by MPP Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence) and co-sponsored by MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park) and MPP Peter Shurman (Thornhill).

### **The Month of May**

A number of significant events usually occur in May, such as Holocaust Remembrance Day, Israel Independence Day, the Jewish Film Festival, Jewish Music Week, the UJA Walk With Israel, the B’nai Brith Canada Annual Policy Conference and the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center Spirit of Hope Benefit.

In 2006, President George W. Bush proclaimed May to be Jewish American Heritage Month in the United States.

## **Messages of Support for Jewish Heritage Month**

### **MPP Mike Colle**

“Proclaiming the month of May *Jewish Heritage Month* will afford all Ontarians a platform to participate in celebrating the contributions that Ontarians of Jewish heritage have made to building and enriching this province and its communities.”

### **David Spiro, Greater Toronto Co-Chair of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs**

“The Jewish community has a long, distinguished heritage in this province spanning well over 200 years. More than half of our country’s 360,000 Jewish Canadians live in Ontario. We are proud of the role our community has played in the province’s history, and will continue working with Ontarians of all backgrounds to help ensure that Ontario remains a great home for future generations.

“The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and UJA Federation of Greater Toronto appreciate and support this multi-partisan initiative. We hope that, through our varied programs and events, Jewish Heritage Month will be meaningful not only for the Jewish community, but for all the people of Ontario.”

### **Dr. Frank Dimant, CEO of B’nai Brith Canada**

“B’nai Brith Canada is very supportive of this opportunity to recognize and celebrate both the historical and the ongoing contributions of the Jewish community of Ontario to every sector of life in the province.”

### **Rabbi Yossi Sapirman, Beth Torah Congregation**

“This honour would allow us all to share in acknowledging the significant contributions made by our community in medicine, science, law, politics, education and business. The celebration of the achievements and contributions made by the Jewish community to this province would provide an opportunity to appreciate and learn about the history, culture, art and music of Ontarians of Jewish heritage.”

### **Avi Benlolo, President & CEO, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies**

“Designating the month of May as Jewish Heritage Month in Ontario is a wonderful opportunity to recognize the Jewish community’s continuing contributions to the multicultural fabric of this province. The educational and cultural potential of such a designation are wide-ranging, and Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies is proud to participate in such a positive effort.

“Many thanks to all three parties for working together to honour and celebrate the achievements of Ontario’s Jewish population; it is due to proposals such as this one that Ontario remains such an appealing province for peoples of all faiths and ethnicities to live and work together.”

**Michael Tibollo, National Congress of Italian Canadians–Toronto District:**

“We congratulate the efforts of MPP Mike Colle and join in supporting the initiative to declare May, Jewish Heritage Month. The Jewish traditions of family, music, food and culture, like those of the Italian community, have become woven into the fabric of our Canadian mosaic and should rightfully be honoured and celebrated. We look forward to attending [Jewish Heritage Month] cultural events and sharing our common heritage as Ontarians and Canadians.”

**To read Jewish Heritage Month Act, visit <http://bit.ly/bill17ON>**

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## Jewish contribution to Ontario lauded

Michelle Bitran, Intern, Friday, May 11, 2012



MPP Mike Colle [Michelle Bitran photo]

**TORONTO** — This May marks the first-ever Ontario Jewish Heritage Month, and Torontonians came out to celebrate in style at Beth Torah Congregation on May 7.

About 150 community members attended the inaugural Jewish Heritage Month celebration, which included a musical performance by Cantor Simon Spiro, his wife, Aliza, and the Beth Tzedec Singers, as well as presentations on Ontario's Jewish history and a reception with refreshments.

The decision to designate May as Jewish Heritage Month in the province was finalized when Bill 17, presented by Eglinton-Lawrence MPP Mike Colle, and co-sponsored by Thornhill MPP Peter Shurman and Parkdale-High Park MPP Cheri DiNovo, was passed into law in late February of this year. The month of May was chosen because of the frequency of Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron, as well as various Jewish cultural events, occurring during this month.

Colle welcomed the crowd at Beth Torah and explained the importance of honouring Ontario's Jewish community. "This event is about celebrating, it's about recognizing, it's about acknowledging the amazing contributions and achievements that have been made to this province over the past 200 years by the Jewish community," he said, adding that in addition to contributions to the arts, culture, music and academia, Jews in Ontario have made a significant impact on human rights legislation.

Colle was joined by St. Paul's MPP Eric Hoskins; Beth Torah's rabbi, Yossi Sapirman; the director of the Ontario Jewish Archives, Dara Solomon; the executive director of women's philanthropy at the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Susan Jackson, and former CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Bernie Farber.

Farber elaborated on Colle's words about Jewish Ontarians who advocated for human rights. He explained that the concepts of justice and compassion, or tzedek, and tikkun olam, or making the world a better place, are part of the foundation of Judaism.

"The pursuit of dignity and righteousness is specified in our Talmud," said Farber. He added that because of the Jewish People's "historic understanding and experience with discrimination and hatred," they are well placed to understand and to fight for the protection and fair treatment of others.

Despite discrimination, Ontario's Jewish community, now estimated at about 200,000 people, has been thriving for almost 200 years. Jackson's dynamic presentation included the stories about historic Jewish institutions in the province, among them Mount Sinai Hospital, the Kiever Shul in Kensington Market and United Bakers Dairy Restaurant, which recently celebrated its 100-year anniversary.

"We are about our stories," said Jackson, explaining the importance of Ontario's Jewish history. Solomon, in her presentation of materials from the Ontario Jewish Archives, echoed that sentiment.

She showed some of the photographs and postcards that represent only a tiny fraction of the vast collection of letters, videos, films and other historical artifacts held at the archives.

For Solomon, who has only recently begun her work at the archives, it is important that the greater Jewish community be able to easily access the wealth of information about the past. "My plan is to make the archives much more accessible through the various social media tools that are out there," she said.

Hoskins, in his speech, also stressed the importance of sharing and celebrating the history of the province's Jewish community, which has "not only overcome tremendous adversity, but has established itself at the heart of Ontario," he said.

Hoskins added that Jewish contribution has been integral to the province's development and is indivisible from Ontario's growth. "Jewish history and Jewish heritage – really that's Ontario's history and Ontario's heritage."

## **MPPs help kick off Jewish Heritage Month**

May 15, 2012 | Jewish Tribune



MPP Mike Colle helped kick off Jewish Heritage Month last week. (Photo: Joanne Hill)

TORONTO – The first Jewish Heritage Month kicked off last week at a special event hosted by MPPs Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence) and Eric Hoskins (St. Pauls).

Private Members' Bill 17 to proclaim the month of May as Jewish Heritage Month in Ontario was introduced in the legislature by Colle in November with the support of fellow MPPs Peter Shurman (Thornhill) and Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park). It received royal assent on April 24.

“This event is about celebrating, it’s about recognizing, it’s about acknowledging the incredible contributions and achievements that have been made to the building of this province over the last 200 years by members of the Jewish community,” said Colle. “People of Jewish heritage... have lived in every nook and corner of this province. We’ve run across so many stories about families in South Porcupine and Kingston and [in] every town there seems to be a story about a Jewish family who either was involved with the fur trade or with dry goods or with construction.

“There are so many incredible stories to be told and this idea of Jewish Heritage Month is really to tell those stories and to make sure we don’t forget those stories.”

Last week’s celebration was held at Beth Torah Congregation and featured guest speakers Susan Jackson, executive director of women’s philanthropy, United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Toronto; Dara Solomon, director, Ontario Jewish Archives; Bernie Farber, former CEO, Canadian Jewish Congress; and Beth Torah’s Rabbi Yossi Sapirman. Cantor Simon Spiro and the Beth Tzedec Singers performed four songs to start the festivities and guests enjoyed food and hot beverages afterwards

# The Canadian Jewish news

## Ontario MPP proposes Jewish Heritage Month

Andy Levy-Ajzenkopf, Staff Reporter, Thursday, December 8, 2011

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Mike Colle

**TORONTO** — Ontario Liberal MPP for Eglinton-Lawrence Mike Colle wants May declared Jewish Heritage Month in Ontario.

On Nov. 30, Colle moved a private members' bill at Queen's Park – the Jewish Heritage Month Act – that he said would, if passed, offer Ontarians an opportunity to “recognize the important contributions that Jewish Canadians have made to Ontario’s social, economic, political and cultural fabric.”

The bill already has all-party support. It was co-sponsored by New Democratic Party MPP for Parkdale-High Park, Cheri DiNovo, and Conservative MPP for Thornhill, Peter Shurman.

Colle, in a statement on his website, said May was chosen because it is “a significant month for the Jewish Canadian community. Various Jewish artistic and cultural events such as the UJA Walk for Israel, Toronto Jewish Film Festival and Jewish Music Week

occur in May. Holocaust Remembrance Day and Israeli Independence Day also frequently occur in May.”

The bill is slated to come up for debate in early 2012.

Speaking to The CJN after he put forward the bill, Colle said the impetus behind drafting the bill stemmed from the proclamation of June being Ontario’s Italian Heritage Month when Bill 103, the Italian Heritage Month Act, received royal assent in the legislature last October.

Shurman was also a co-sponsor of this bill.

“I thought we should do something to celebrate all the contributions that came from the Jewish community,” Colle said.

Asked if these bills could open the door for controversy if other communities want to have their own months of recognition, Colle said there are already months dedicated to other groups, including a Chinese Heritage Month, as well as the Italian Heritage Month.

“If they’re done in the vein of inclusivity and social harmony... I’m approaching this as we will celebrate and honour any group that’s made a positive contribution to Ontario. We don’t want to limit anyone,” he said.

He said he envisions Jewish Heritage Month as a way to educate all of Ontario’s children about the Jewish community.

Colle said he’d consulted with his many of his Jewish constituents about this for the past year and received “overwhelming” support from them for the idea.

David Spiro, Greater Toronto co-chair of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), commended Colle on the bill.

“The Jewish community has a long, distinguished heritage in this province spanning well over 200 years. More than half of our country’s 360,000 Jewish Canadians live in Ontario. We are proud of the role our community has played in the province’s history, and will continue working with Ontarians of all backgrounds to help ensure that Ontario remains a great home for future generations,” he said in a statement.

“We hope that, through our varied programs and events, Jewish Heritage Month will be meaningful not only for the Jewish community, but for all the people of Ontario.”