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Rivals Share Stage At Grand Opening Of Jewish Museum

 BY JILL GARDINER - Staff Reporter of the Sun
 December 8, 2004

Political rivals shared the stage yesterday afternoon in Brooklyn for the opening of what is said to be the nation's first Jewish Children's Museum.

The museum was dedicated to the memory of Ari Halberstam, a 16-year-old who was killed on the Brooklyn Bridge in 1994 when a Lebanese gunman opened fire on the van carrying the teenager and other chasidic students. The museum is at Crown Heights, where rioting erupted in 1991 between the Jewish and black communities and two people were killed.

Yesterday, Senator Clinton and Mayor Giuliani, opponents in the 2000 campaign until Mr. Giuliani withdrew, and Mayor Bloomberg and the speaker of the City Council, Gifford Miller, adversaries in the 2005 mayoral race, each addressed the crowd of several hundred people, who packed under a large white tent in the steady rain. Nearly a dozen council members and other elected officials also attended the dedication, which was timed to coincide with the first night of Chanukah.

"Ten years ago my son Ari was gunned down just as his life was starting," Devorah Halberstam said. "My personal nightmare was but a sampling of what was to come later on 9/11. Our response to those who will destroy civilization as we know it is this museum.

"What we are inaugurating here today is the answer to terror, a response to those who wish us ill, to those who wish to destroy freedom, democracy, tolerance, and idea of the universal brotherhood of humankind," she said.

Mrs. Clinton said the 50,000-squarefoot building would honor Ari's memory on a daily basis by teaching all children, both Jewish and non-Jewish, about Judaism's culture and customs.

"It is a wonderful mitzvah, and there is no doubt in my mind that this museum will literally change lives," she said.

Mr. Giuliani recalled the night of the sniper shooting on the bridge, which took place shortly after he was elected mayor. "I remember that day as if it were



yesterday," he said, explaining that it did not take long to determine that it was an anti-Semitic act.

"You know, there are things while you're mayor, as Mayor Bloomberg knows, thousands and thousands of things happen, and then there are a few that you will remember for the rest of your life, and that day is one of them."

The executive director of the museum, Rabbi Yerachmiel Benjaminson, said the museum would help to foster understanding between cultures. The \$30-million, seven-story structure has 80 activities and exhibits, including a model kosher supermarket, a 12-foot-tall dreidel, a Chanukah newsroom where television newscasts about the holiday's story can be taped, a movie theater, and a community center.

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