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Former skinhead to speak at Holocaust Memorial Center

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Frank Meeink

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For years, [Frank Meeink](#) had a swastika tattooed on his neck and “skinhead” written across his knuckles — symbols of the hatred in his heart towards nonwhites and non-Christians. He was sent to prison as a teenager for beating up a rival skinhead.

But after meeting a Jewish man who hired him to move furniture, Meeink began to rethink his views, changing from a man who often fought with minorities to someone who promotes diversity and tolerance.

Tonight, he'll speak about the importance of empathy at the [Holocaust Memorial Center](#) in Farmington Hills for an event hosted by the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit.

“All I talked about was violence and hatred,” Meeink, 39, said of his past. But now, he talks about “having empathy for another human being no matter who they are. ... We're all the same.”

Meeink's talk comes at a time of renewed concern among Jewish Americans and others about white supremacist groups after the shooting last month at Jewish centers in Kansas by a neo-Nazi who killed three people he thought were Jewish. The suspect, who has a record of spouting anti-minority rhetoric, has visited Michigan to meet and attend rallies with white supremacist leaders based in the state, such as the late Bob Miles.

In metro Detroit, the Jewish Federation worked with local Jewish leaders and law enforcement to discuss security concerns after the shooting. Last year, two local minority leaders — Scott Kaufman, CEO of the Jewish Federation, and the Rev. Wendell Anthony, head of the Detroit Branch NAACP — were said by authorities to be on a list of targets by a neo-Nazi man in Ohio who was arrested in December 2012.

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Last week, FBI national director James Comey told the Anti-Defamation League that the agency is concerned about “domestic terrorism from individuals and groups who are motivated by political, racial, religious, or social ideology — ideology fueled by bigotry and prejudice.”

“They seek to inflict great harm, and no one is immune. No race, no religion, no ethnicity, no way of life,” Comey said.

In metro Detroit, there are several white supremacist groups, including the National Socialist Movement, which is “the largest and most prominent neo-Nazi group in the United States,” according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

“It’s definitely a threat,” Meeink, who is of Irish and Italian descent, said of the white-power group and others. “They want to impose their will on everyone else.”

Meeink was part of neo-Nazi and Christian Identity movements that railed against non-whites and Jews, seeing them as evil people secretly controlling the world.

Growing up in Philadelphia, Meeink suffered abuse from his father and grew up in rough neighborhoods. He became a skinhead at 13. He was told constantly that “my purpose ... was to destroy the rest of the world that isn’t of European descent.”

But after meeting two Jewish men who helped him with work and an alcohol problem, he started getting more into sports, which he had loved as a child. Meeink said he had his Nazi tattoos removed thanks to a Jewish woman from the University of Pennsylvania. Today, he works with Harmony Through Hockey, which introduces hockey to African-American and Latino youth across the country.

“I came to this conclusion – black, white, Asian, Latino – we’re all equal,” he said.

The event starts at 7:30 p.m. tonight at the Holocaust Memorial Center, 28123 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. Frank Meeink’s book “Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead: The Frank Meeink Story” is available at Amazon.com.

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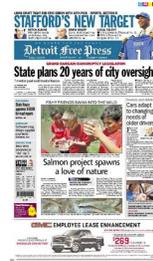


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