



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

November 11, 2025

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Elizabeth Teagarden



## *Commemorating Veterans Day with The Butterfly Project – Lessons in Positive Outcomes*

by **Elly Clary**

At a Veterans Day meeting that recognized Rotarians for military service, the program appropriately dealt with the Holocaust.

Nazi Germany murdered six million Jews during World War II, and 1.5 million were children. Charlotte is a strong participant in The Butterfly Project, an effort that originated in San Diego to remember those children through education, the arts and memorial making.

Lori Semel is the Butterfly Project supervisor at Charlotte's Levine Jewish Community Center. The movement encourages youths to paint ceramic butterflies, with a goal to create 1.5 million brightly colored insect shapes, one for each child who died.

"The project was founded to educate about the dangers of hatred and bigotry," Semel said, "and cultivate empathy and social responsibility."

From its inception in 2006, the effort has produced almost 430,000 painted butterflies worldwide. Since 2008, nearly 70,000 have been painted through the Charlotte project, which includes a 2.5-hour educational field trip for students in Mecklenburg and surrounding counties.

"Middle school students get a lot out of the program," Semel said, "but it was their parents who were taking pictures of my slides and were crying. We

realized everybody really needs this history and this education. It's still mostly for middle school students, but we are going out and working with adult communities, as well."

Two Holocaust survivors, one of whom died last year, have shared their personal stories through the Charlotte program in Shalom Park. The park on Providence Road includes a sculpture adorned with about 6,000 butterflies painted by children, with bright primary colors. Some dark shades "represent the ashes of those who are no longer with us," Semel said. In pieces of mirrored-glass, viewers can see themselves.

Students may also take their newly painted ceramics back to their schools and create their own displays.

"Butterflies are like people in that they don't start out as butterflies," Semel said. "That gives us a chance to talk to students about transformation. We're always changing. We all have biases and prejudices. We just have to recognize what our biases are and accept new ideas."

Responding to a question, Semel said the NC General Assembly passed a mandate that public schools must teach the Holocaust. Teacher training is not funded, she said, but some are finding preparations on their own.

Here is the recording:

With slides: [Commemorating Veterans Day with The Butterfly Project – Lessons in Positive Outcomes](#)

Without slides: [Commemorating Veterans Day with The Butterfly Project – Lessons in Positive Outcomes](#)

The introduction begins at about 37 minutes.