

In Greenwich

Field of hate

Swastika found on golf course

By Sherry Shameer

GREENWICH—An act of nature hid an act of vandalism at Bruce Memorial Golf Course in Greenwich earlier this month.

Due to the heavy winds from the storm on Nov. 1, the golf course was officially closed that Saturday. The next day, while a groundskeeper was blowing leaves off the grass, he discovered a swastika had been burned into a two-foot square section of the 17th green.

Officials believe the perpetrator used gasoline or corrosive liquid to burn the Nazi symbol into the green.

As of press time, there were no suspects in the case.

Some speculated this was just a Halloween prank. But Rabbi Robert Lennick of Greenwich Reform Synagogue said, "It's very important not to slough this away as a childhood prank. Somewhere the people who put that swastika on the ground either overheard, or sat at the dinner table, or were engaged in conversation against the Jews.

"It's unthinkable that anyone in our time doesn't know the meaning of a swastika, so to plead ignorance is unacceptable...This is purely an act of

prejudice and should be understood only as such so that we send a very strong message that behavior like this is not tolerated in our community or any community."

Greenwich First Selectman Thomas Ragland contacted Jewish leaders in Greenwich as soon as he learned about the vandalism. He then ordered the vandalized area to be replaced with new turf by the next morning.

"He responded in a very encouraging way," said Joel Kaye, Fairfield County chair of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). "We couldn't have hoped for a better response."

Other bias crimes

Neither the police nor the ADL was able to provide accurate statistics on the number of bias crimes in Greenwich. But according to Lennick, who has worked with the Greenwich Coalition on Diversity, it appears that a bias incident has occurred in Greenwich in the recent past approximately once every 18 months. Three years ago swastikas were spraypainted at Greenwich High School. In June 1995, there were racist messages against blacks found printed in code in the high

school yearbook.

ADL regional director Robert Leikind said the most recent incident does not seem to be linked to an organized group or to the previous cases.

The Greenwich Coalition on Diversity, which meets monthly, serves to educate people about various ethnic groups and trains people on how to deal with conflicts. Maggie Wein, a participant in the coalition, said she believes that the problem is that most people think there is no problem. "We keep preaching to the converted," she complained. "We have to get a handle on this for our kids." ■