

# Goddard College

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 14, 2011

## **Social Justice Pioneer Stephan Ross to Receive Goddard College Award**

*Holocaust Survivor to Receive Presidential Award for Activism*

Plainfield, Vt. --- In 1959, Stephan Ross missed his graduation from Goddard College because he could not afford the essential items needed for the ceremony.

Fifty-two years later, Ross will return to the renowned activist college in central Vermont, armed with his diploma, to receive the first Presidential Award for Activism on Sunday, September 18 at 10 a.m. in the college's Haybarn Theater.

The Goddard College Presidential Award for Activism recognizes alumni who have made significant contributions in the field of social justice and who embody the mission and values of Goddard College.

Originally from Lodz, Poland, Ross was imprisoned by the Nazis at age eight. His parents and six brothers and sisters were killed. Between 1940 and 1945, he survived ten different concentration camps. At 13, he was liberated from Dachau by American troops, who saved him from certain death. He later completed the requirements for his bachelor's in Sociology at Goddard in 1959, but never attended the graduation ceremony.

The public recognition of Ross as a distinguished Goddard alumnus comes as the college approaches its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013, and is conducting an extensive retrospective of the students and faculty that have shaped its past.

Since her arrival on campus last year, Goddard's newly inaugurated President Barbara Vacarr has been poring over student records, in order to understand the history of the iconic institution she now leads.

When Vacarr discovered that Ross never received his diploma in 1959, she called him in Boston, asked for a meeting, and arrived days later with a framed diploma and personally presented it to him on behalf of the College.

"It's about time," said Vacarr, one year on the job after a 23-year career at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. "This is a man who has suffered more than most of us can ever imagine, and what he has done with his life since is nothing short of extraordinary."

After Vacarr discovered that Ross had completed his undergraduate at Goddard, she consulted the college archives and read the senior thesis he wrote for his bachelor's degree in sociology, which focused on the interplay between dysfunctional family dynamics and the challenges troubled youth face in overcoming adversity.

"When I read his senior thesis I was absolutely stunned," said Vacarr. "When his camp was liberated at the end of the war, he was only 13 years old and came to this country completely illiterate. Incredibly, 14 years later, he wrote an incredibly poignant, nuanced, and superior study – in beautiful prose, I should add – on how to help young people overcome adversity."

Ultimately, Vacarr said, Ross' senior thesis was about understanding his own experience in the world in order to improve the lives of others.

"Goddard nurtured in Stephan, the way it does in all Goddard students, a drive to understand life experiences and translate that learning into actions that address the roots of the problems we face in society," Vacarr said.

"Stephan Ross is a living example of what a Goddard education is all about: an activist-oriented, rigorous academic inquiry that compels students to take action to effect change in our local and global communities."

Ross went on to receive his Master's in Psychology from Boston University in 1962 and worked for close to 50 years as a counselor for disadvantaged youth in Boston.

Among Ross' many contributions to elevate young people from the effects of poverty was the creation of fee waivers and funding assistance from the College Board for impoverished youth in Boston to take the SAT and apply to college. Owing in no small part to Ross's efforts, SAT fee waivers are now a nationwide program of the College Board.

After undergoing heart surgery in 1986, Ross set out to memorialize the Holocaust in Boston. Working with then Boston mayor Ray Flynn, he raised more than \$14 million from public and private entities to erect the [New England Holocaust Memorial](#) and Liberator's Monument in downtown Boston. The Liberator's Monument was built to honor the American troops who liberated the Dachau Concentration Camp.

Ross will attend commencement with his son Michael, a city councilor in Boston representing neighborhoods including Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Fenway, and Mission Hill.

Ross will receive the award and address graduates and their guests at Goddard's Masters in Psychology and Counseling Program Commencement on **Sunday, September 18 at 10 a.m.** in the college's Haybarn Theater.

### **About Goddard College:**

Originally formed as the Green Mountain Central Institute in 1863, and becoming the Goddard Seminary in 1870, Goddard College was chartered in 1938 at its Plainfield, Vermont campus by founding President Royce "Tim" Pitkin. Its mission is to advance the theory and practice of learning by undertaking new experiments based upon the ideals of democracy and the principles of progressive education asserted by John Dewey. In 1963, Goddard College became the first U.S. college to offer adult-degree programs, and now specializes in MA, MFA, BA and BFA low-residency education. Offering accredited degree programs from campuses in Plainfield, Vermont and Port Townsend, Washington, Goddard's low-residency format offers the best of on-campus and distance education, with experienced faculty advisors, rigorous on-campus residencies, and the freedom to study from anywhere.

### **MEDIA CONTACTS & INTERVIEW REQUESTS:**

Diane Zeigler  
[zig@ksepartners.com](mailto:zig@ksepartners.com)  
802-839-6520

Kevin Ellis  
[kevin@ksepartners.com](mailto:kevin@ksepartners.com)  
802-371-8112

###