



**RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY**

**Office of Marketing and Communications**

**Press Release**

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## **Portuguese Diplomat's Feat of Holocaust Rescue to be Discussed**

MAHWAH, N.J. – Joan Arnay Halperin and Monique Rubens Krohn, the daughters of two families rescued by the Portuguese diplomat, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, will tell the story of his unique and heroic accomplishment on Thursday, March 2 at 9:30 a.m. in the Robert A. Scott Student Center, Alumni Lounges (SC157-158) at Ramapo College of New Jersey. The Gross Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies will sponsor this event.

As the Portuguese consul stationed in Bordeaux, France, Sousa Mendes found himself confronted in June of 1940 with the reality of many thousands of refugees outside the Portuguese consulate attempting to escape the horrors of the Nazi war machine. These persons were in desperate need of visas to get out of France, and a Portuguese visa would allow them safe passage through Spain to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, where they could find liberty to travel to other parts of the globe.

In the end, Sousa Mendes defied his government that was officially neutral, but pro-Nazi at the time and issued some 30,000 visas, including about 10,000 to Jews, over the period of a few days.

Sousa Mendes's act of heroism cost him and his family dearly. He was stripped of his diplomatic position and forbidden from earning a living. His children were blacklisted and prevented from attending university or finding meaningful work. In this way what was once an illustrious and well-respected family – one of the great families of Portugal – was crushed and destroyed. Even his family's ancestral home, known as "Casa do Passal," was repossessed by the bank and eventually sold to cover debts.

His courage has only been posthumously recognized. The first recognition came in 1966 from Israel's Yad Vashem, which declared Aristides de Sousa Mendes to be a "Righteous Among the Nations." In 1986, the United States Congress issued a proclamation honoring his heroic act. Later he was finally recognized by Portugal, when its President Mario Soares apologized to the Sousa Mendes family and the Portuguese Parliament promoted him posthumously to the rank of Ambassador.

Joan Arnay Halperin holds a B.A. in Theatre and Drama from the University of Wisconsin, a Master's degree in TESOL from Adelphi University and is retired from the New York City Department of Education, where she worked as a teacher, teacher trainer and grant writer for her district. She is a former Secretary of the Sousa Mendes Foundation and current Director of Educational Initiatives for the foundation. She participated in the Sousa Mendes Foundation's 2013 and 2016 "Journey on the Road to Freedom" and gave testimony in the documentary film, *With God Against Man*. Joan is the author of *My Sister's Eyes: A Family Chronicle of Rescue and Loss During WWII*, detailing how her family evaded the Nazi dragnet thanks to Aristides de Sousa Mendes.

Monique Rubens Krohn is an accomplished writer and historian whose career has spanned many sectors and fields. Early on, she was a reporter based at the United Nations, writing primarily on emerging countries' development issues. From there she served as internal communications manager at Sterling Drug, Inc. and then crossed into small business, editing and producing newsletters on health and wellness for Medical Second Opinion, Inc. She then moved into the world of non-profits, serving as board member and Executive Director for the Heritage Trail Association, a Bridgewater-based organization that produces bus and walking tours, school programs and symposia on Somerset County history. Currently, she writes book and film reviews for an online media network and is the Secretary of the Sousa Mendes Foundation, based in New York City.

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes mistaken for a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.