

COMMUNITY UNITY / STRONGER THAN HATE

Pittsburgh faith community honored by new museum

Museum of the Courageous has included Pittsburgh's faith community among its first honorees in recognition of its response to the Oct. 2018 synagogue shooting.

By **JUSTIN VELLUCCI**

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The "Stronger Than Hate" logo that adorns T-shirts, kippahs, lawn signs, hoodies, buttons and more. It has become synonymous with support for both Pittsburgh and the Jewish community following the shooting at the Tree of Life building on Oct. 27, 2018. (Photo by Dave Rullo)

The Pittsburgh faith community's response to the deadly synagogue attack of Oct. 27, 2018, is continuing to garner national attention — this time from a budding national nonprofit dedicated to combating hate.

[The Museum of the Courageous](#), a New York-based 501(c)(3) that champions stories about individual and group responses to hate and injustice, on Monday announced its inaugural Courageous Class. Pittsburgh's faith community, as a collective, was represented on the rolls.

The announcement — which was timed, in part, with a "Stand Up To Hate" campaign and billboard placements in Times Square — came as the nation honored Martin Luther King Jr., as news outlets continued to unfurl the fallout from a divisive presidential election, and as many in the United States continue to witness a growing tide of hate.

Honorees in the Courageous Class include "leaders who fought for LBGT, gender, racial and religious equity; activists who demanded redress for past injustices; and everyday individuals who refused to stay silent when hate threatened their communities," according to the museum's leadership. These stories show that even small actions can change the course of history and influence others to stand up.

“These stories are really offering us inspiration and a pathway forward,” said Teresa Vazquez, executive director and founding trustee of the museum. “They’re the stories we need to hear as a country.”

The inaugural Courageous Class includes Darnella Frazier, the 17-year-old who filmed the murder of George Floyd; Shahid Shafi, a Republican in Texas who refused to surrender his right to religious freedom when others tried to oust him due to his Muslim faith; a group of fourth-graders from California who demanded officials redress a government policy of mass discriminatory deportations against Mexican Americans in the 1930s; and others.

Pittsburgh, Vazquez said, was an obvious addition to those honored. It is the only community designated as an honoree this year.

“What I saw that was so special was that, at a moment of violence, a moment of terror — it could have divided a community — the Pittsburgh community came together to show that hate had no place there, and it was really across faiths,” Vazquez said. “The conversation of how a community can come together ... felt like something to lift up.”

Not all of those honored were pulled from the news of recent years. The Museum of the Courageous also is honoring Vernon Dahmer Sr., a Mississippi man who fought in the 1960s to ensure Black citizens could vote freely and died defending his family from a white supremacist attack; and Pauli Murray, whose vision and dedication in 1950s Washington, D.C., helped topple the doctrine of separate but equal and carved a path for women’s rights.

Maggie Feinstein, who heads the [10.27 Healing Partnership](#) in Pittsburgh, said the museum honor is an extension of the Jewish tradition of telling a deceased person’s story to ensure their memory is a blessing. Feinstein, who was interviewed for a story the museum is sharing about the Pittsburgh faith community, also said the honor speaks volumes about what it means to be a Pittsburgher.

“I am just so honored that Pittsburgh can say, in a moment of crisis, there were big acts of courage that helped us through,” Feinstein told the Chronicle. “What we can do is realize you don’t have to be a leader [to be courageous]. You can conduct acts of courage in your everyday life.”

“You can see in the inaugural class a lot about freedom of religion, as well as welcoming the stranger — and those were two strong themes here,” Feinstein added.

The Museum of the Courageous is building what it touts as “the largest collection of stories about individuals standing up to acts of hate based on race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity and ability.” Formed in 2019, the organization eventually hopes to house these stories in a physical space, amplifying untold and under-told examples of courage to continuously bend American citizens and society toward justice. **PJC**

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