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Pittsburgh's faith community inducted into Museum of the Courageous



PAUL GUGGENHEIMER | Monday, January 18, 2021 8:52 p.m.



AP

In October 2019, one year after the Tree of Life attack, a man wearing a "Stronger Than Hate" yarmulke stands outside the Tree of Life synagogue in Squirrel Hill.

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Pittsburgh is being honored for the way its faith community responded to the deadly 2018 attack on the Tree of Life synagogue.

It is being inducted into the inaugural class of the Museum of the Courageous. The announcement was made Monday along with billboard placements in Times Square in New York City. The organization, founded in 2019, describes itself as "celebrating courageous individuals who stand up to hate."

"We truly believe that those who stand up to hate best embody American ideals of justice and equality," said Teresa Vazquez, executive director and founding trustee of the Museum of the Courageous. "It's our role in this world to amplify these stories of courage that truly deserve wider recognition and attention. We want to lift up those stories in order to bend our country towards justice."

Vazquez said the way Pittsburgh's religious community responded in solidarity to the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in America's history is a story of inspiration.

"As I was watching the story unfold from hundreds of miles away, what I was seeing was this incredible coming together of a community where violence and terror had played out on 10/27," Vazquez said. "Violence and terror was meant to pull the community apart, but the community made the decision to come together and the faith community across religions was leading that charge."

Eleven people were shot to death at Tree of Life on Oct. 27, 2018, after a lone gunman stormed the building. Maggie Feinstein, director of the 10.27 Healing Partnership, said the moments of courage on that day not only impacted those who lost family members or survived the shooting but the entire community.

"Lots of people are being reminded that 10/27 brought out a lot of what is the best about Pittsburgh and I think it's so beautiful to be recognized as part of this class of the courageous with this museum," Feinstein said. "We in Pittsburgh get to hold up this moment in time when people had to make a decision about how to react to such a terrible act of hatred.

"How people reacted was to come out immediately to know who to call, who might need something and how to band together to meet that need. So, what I love about this is how the Museum of the Courageous keeps that story in infamy along with other stories."

The nine inductees in the inaugural class include Darnella Frazier, the 17-year-old who recorded the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020, igniting a global uprising to confront racism and police brutality.

Also being inducted are Shahid Shafi and Texas Republicans. In 2019, Shafi, a Republican official in Tarrant County, Texas, refused to surrender his rights to religious freedom when a local group tried to remove him from his leadership role due to his Muslim faith. Texas Republicans stood up for Shafi and reaffirmed his rights.

Another inductee, Aiko Herzig Yoshinaga, exposed the truth about Japanese-American internment camps in 1983, proving through her research that her internment was not a "military necessity," as the U.S. government claimed.

At present, the Museum of the Courageous exists online at motc.org, as well as on Instagram and Facebook @museumofthecourageous.

An immersive museum space is being developed for the future in either New York or Washington, according to Vazquez.

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