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Pittsburgh faith community honored for response to Tree of Life attack



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A new Museum of the Courageous — a virtual institute that aims to inspire people to stand against hatred and injustice — is honoring Pittsburgh’s faith community for the way it stood in solidarity with the Jewish community in the wake of the [deadly 2018 Tree of Life synagogue attack](#).

The faith community will be honored in the inaugural “Courageous Class” alongside several individuals, including the teenager who filmed the police killing of George Floyd and others who exposed and stood against discrimination and harassment.

The New York-based museum, which launched in 2019 with private donor support and which hopes eventually to have a brick-and-mortar exhibit space, announced the initiative Monday through billboard placements in such high-visibility settings as New York's Times Square and the Las Vegas Strip.

“The museum “was founded to really inspire more people to stand up to hatred in America,” said Teresa Vazquez, its executive director. Telling stories such as these can motivate others toward similar actions, she said. “It’s our job to amplify these untold and under-told examples of courage so we can continue to bend our country toward justice.”

She said Pittsburgh’s interfaith community exemplified those ideals in how it rallied behind the Jewish community after the Oct. 27, 2018, anti-Semitic attack at the Tree of Life / Or L’Simcha synagogue in Squirrel Hill, where [a gunman killed 11 worshipers](#) from three congregations and wounded two others, along with four police officers responding to the scene.

Christian and Muslim representatives stood in solidarity with Jewish leaders at vigils, raised funds for victims and maintained those relationships when houses of worship of other faiths were later targeted for attacks.

Maggie Feinstein, director of the 10.27 Healing Partnership, which was established to assist those traumatized by the attack, said it was an honor for Pittsburgh to be included in the class.

“It wasn’t something we sought out,” she said, but it’s in line with what the Jewish community experienced in “the way the interfaith community stood together after the shooting.”

She added: “When we hear other people’s stories of courage, it encourages more people to be courageous.”

Numerous other people are included in the inaugural Courageous Class for actions as far back as the 1950s.

They include:

- Darnella Frazier, the 17-year-old whose video of the police killing of George Floyd last year in Minneapolis ignited worldwide protests against racism and police brutality.
- Shahid Shafi, a Republican Party officer in Tarrant County, Texas, and the Texas Republicans who supported him in defeating a bid by other Republicans in 2019 to oust him because of his Muslim faith.

- Ricky John Best and Talliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, who were killed, and Michael Fletcher, who was wounded, while protecting two Black teenage girls on a Portland, Ore., train from a knife-wielding man shouting anti-Muslim and racist insults in 2017.

- Teachers Ana Ramos and Leslie Hiatt and their fourth-grade students in Bell Gardens, Calif., who successfully advocated in 2015 for a law requiring history curricula to cover mass deportations of people of Mexican descent, many of them U.S. citizens, in the 1930s.

Others honor those standing up on behalf of LGBTQ+ persons, Japanese-Americans who were interned during World War II and Black citizens under the Jim Crow era.

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