

FIGHTING HATE / MUSEUM OF THE COURAGEOUS

Steeler Zach Banner honored for standing against antisemitism

Banner took a stand against hate after Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver DeSean Jackson posted an antisemitic message he attributed to Adolf Hitler on social media.

By **JUSTIN VELLUCCI**

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Zach Banner (Photo by Katharine Lotz / Getty Images via Zach Banner)

Pittsburgher. Steelers offensive tackle, #72. Champion in the fight against antisemitism and hate.

There are a lot of ways to describe Zach Banner, but it is his efforts battling antisemitism that earned him induction into this year's "Courageous Class" at the Museum of the Courageous in New York City.

MOTC celebrates acts of standing against hate that shift the American conversation toward justice, highlighting what the group calls "untold and under-told stories of courage that remind us of our individual power to stand against hate."

"We curate the stories of Americans who have stood up against hate — at the root of the museum, we believe America's diversity is its strength and attacks of hate attack that strength," said Teresa Vazquez, executive director and founding trustee of the MOTC. "We are just starting to see the ripple effects of Zach's statement [against antisemitism] and he's continued to do that work."

Banner, who made his NFL debut in 2017, [took a stand against hate in July 2020](#), two days after Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver DeSean Jackson posted an antisemitic message he attributed to Adolf Hitler on social media. Banner

came to the defense of the Jewish community in a series of tweets and videos that he said he hoped would help educate others who might have misconceptions about Jews.

“This video is to transition from the incident, and move forward as a community,” Banner said in one video. “Not to harp on @DeSeanJackson10 mistake, but to progress by educating ourselves. We can’t move forward while allowing ourselves to leave another minority race in the dark.”

In the months that followed, Banner became increasingly involved in events and programs that tackled antisemitism.

Banner responded last week with humility to news that he was being recognized by the MOTC.

“It’s a huge honor ... I’ve met so many people who stand up to hate and it’s a community effort,” Banner told the Chronicle. “We’re just the ones pushed up on the pedestal. It’s an honor, it really is. I humbly accept it and step back into the crowd, the community.”

Banner has strong links to the Jewish community. As an undergraduate at the University of Southern California, he pledged Zeta Beta Tau, the world’s first and largest Jewish fraternity.

When he pledged ZBT, he said he was told it was “a multicultural fraternity.”

“There was no Star of David on the door,” laughed Banner, who stressed his mother never taught him to view Jews negatively.

But, when attending national fraternity meetings, Banner said his eyes were opened to the Jewish experience in America.

“I had no idea there was this kind of hate,” Banner said. “I had no idea that Jewish men and women had trouble getting into fraternities — that’s crazy.”

MOTC was launched in 2019, and last year announced its inaugural Courageous Class.

“We know that these profound stories of courage bear the potential to change hearts and minds,” Vazquez said. “As we wade toward the two-year mark on the pandemic, this year’s honorees remind us that humanity is at its strongest when it is united against injustice and discrimination.”

In addition to Banner, the 2022 Courageous Class includes six others who stood against hate, including Kym Worthy and Kim Trent, who mobilized Black women and men to demand justice when 11,324 untested rape kits were discovered in a Detroit police storage unit; and Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins, a disability rights activist who abandoned her wheelchair to climb up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to compel Congress to pass disability rights legislation.

“The 2022 Courageous Class illuminates the powerful American cultural narrative that individuals have the agency to change the future for the better,” said David Neil, board chair and founding trustee of MOTC. “The intention behind the museum and celebrating these stories of courage is to inspire others to stand up to hate.” **PJC**

Justin Vellucci is a freelance writer living in Pittsburgh.