



News

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Steelers player honored by Museum of the Courageous for standing up to antisemitism

By Jordana Rosenfeld



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CP Photo: Jared Wickerham

Pittsburgh Steelers offensive tackle Zach Banner walks in a June 2020 march to mark the two-year anniversary of the death of Antwon Rose II, a 17-year-old shot by an East Pittsburgh police officer.

Steelers offensive tackle Zach Banner is one of seven honorees in the Museum of the Courageous' newest Courageous Class, which spotlights individuals and groups who "take a stand against hate."

“Standing up against hate is natural for me so it feels good to be rewarded for being myself,”

Banner tells *Pittsburgh City Paper*.

Banner is being recognized for a July 2020 event when he recorded and posted a heartfelt video of himself expressing his concerns about the gravity of antisemitism after he saw a fellow NFL player post an antisemitic quote on Twitter.

In the video, Banner says, “There’s a common misbelief amongst Black and Brown people — I know this from growing up, and I’ve heard it, and I’ve listened to it — that Jewish people are like any other white race... you don’t understand that they are a minority as well...”

Banner urges others to learn more about antisemitism and take it seriously when they see it.

Empathizing with others comes naturally to him, Banner says. “Zach credits his parents and cross-cultural upbringing with instilling a strong sense of empathy for others,” the Museum of the Courageous writes, “His mother is Chamorro and immigrated from Guam when she was sixteen, and his father is African American. Still, growing up outside of Tacoma, Washington, he didn’t know any Jewish people and admittedly lacked knowledge about antisemitism in America.”

Banner says that it was during college at the University of South California that he first began meeting Jewish people and being welcomed into Jewish communities, which he describes to *City Paper* as “[finding] a new side of my heart and my spirit.”

“Since then,” Banner continues, “I’ve been able to get close to so many different Jewish

people, men and women alike. I've been cultured very, very well with different things like Shabbat dinner and other festivities I have warmed my heart to. It warmed a certain part of my heart that I didn't know existed."

Launched in 2019, the Museum of the Courageous is an online collection of stories of Americans standing up to hate, which aims to be "the most extensive collection of courageous stories and inspire people to take a stand."

The museum honors both contemporary and historical acts of courage. Banner's fellow honorees in the 2022 Courageous Class include disability justice advocate Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins, former journalist and activist for Asian-American and LGBTQ rights Helen Zia, and the Dallas Morning News for their coverage of KKK terror in the early 1920s.

"After the tremendous response to last year's inaugural Courageous Class, we know that these profound stories of courage bear the potential to change hearts and minds," said Teresa Vazquez, executive director and founding trustee of MOTC. "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. We're immensely proud to celebrate the inspiring 2022 Courageous Class, who have shown that every act of courage, no matter how small, has the potential to push back against hate in a meaningful manner."

"I'm getting this award because of my platform and who I am ... [but] I don't see it really as much of an award, I see it as an example," Banner tells *CP*, "and I'm OK with being used [as an example] for something that means so much."

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