

Saguaro High teacher honored for Holocaust class

BY J. GRABER
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Ashley Crose has always had a passion about teaching youngsters about the Holocaust and genocide, but he got an idea about how to do it when he visited the Martin Springer Institute at NAU about eight years ago.

Crose, a Saguaro High School teacher the last 19 years, put a curriculum together, got permission from the Scottsdale Unified School District Governing Board and launched the class this year.

"A lot of people, when it comes to the Holocaust and genocide studies, think it's about death and you're talking about death and destruction and bad things. But I wanted to bring it to my students with the aspect of teaching them empathy through learning about the Holocaust and bringing the human side to it," he said. "It's much more than just teaching them the numbers of 6 million Jews perished during the Holocaust. It's more to teach the human stories behind it."

Those lessons are just as relevant for today's high school students, he said.

"It's teaching empathy, it's teaching anti-bullying, it's teaching that choices have effects on others," Crose said.

The class, which had 14 students in the fall and 13 this semester, spends nine weeks each on the Holocaust and at other genocides, such as the Armenian genocide as well as those in Darfur and Rwanda.

Crose was awarded the Shofar Zakhor Award by the Phoenix Holocaust Association this year for his work teaching the class.

"Ashley's committed to the study of the

holocaust in the schools as a way to help students understand the horrors of genocide and how not to let it happen again," said Eva Flaster, Phoenix Holocaust Association board member and chair of the Yom HoShoah Commemoration, which celebrates the survivors of the Holocaust and the righteous who worked against it.

The Shofar Zakhor award is for those who teach about the Holocaust. "Shofar" is Hebrew for a rams horn and "zakhkor" means "memory."

"It's not just against Jews," Flaster said. "There is genocide, there is hate against many groups and that's something we need to work against."

She noted that racism is on the rise today across the nation. "I think there is a lot of division in this country and people are unnerved and then you look for scapegoats," Flaster said.

Crose's class stands as a lesson of what can happen when racism takes hold in society.

He starts by instilling a sense of self-awareness in his students and explained:

"It's very important early on to build an atmosphere of understanding among (the students) so that they feel comfortable in the class so they are able to share. We spend a lot of time on building identity. (They) identify as a group, identify as a student. What's the identity of the school? What's the identity of Scottsdale, Arizona? By building that kind of a self awareness, where they're coming from, they can understand the survivors' testimony that much more and the human condition that much more."

Crose, who is a fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, intro-



Ashley Crose

duces his students to individual survivors through memoirs and in-person through Zoom calls. He tries to get as many different stories into the class as possible.

"There's not one single story to tell," he said. "There's all different aspects."

He even takes his students on a tour of the Auschwitz death camp with someone in Poland through Zoom.

Crose said it is a great honor to win the Shofar Zakhor Award.

"You have no idea," he said. "When the Phoenix Holocaust Association called me last week, I didn't know what to say.

"I got goose bumps and the hair on my arms stood up. It's a great honor to receive this. I can't believe my name is being associated with some of the educators that are on this list. Understand, 54 holocaust survivors that are local won the award last year and to be mentioned in the same aspect as that, I am very taken back." 🙏