

MEIERS CORNERS

Coming together to denounce hate



Congressman Max Rose, District Attorney Michael McMahon, and Councilman Steven Matteo paint over the "Synagogue of Satan" hate speech written on a Yeshiva next to the Chabad of Staten Island. Photos by Shira Stoll, Staten Island Advance

Leaders and residents gather for unity rally to condemn anti-Semitic graffiti at yeshiva

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Less than a week after hate speech was written on a yeshiva wall in Meiers Corners, nearly 100 Staten Islanders, including religious and community leaders, gathered at a unity rally on Tuesday to denounce hate and encourage peace and kindness.

The unity rally was held at the Chabad of Staten Island on Tuesday.

The graffiti was discovered on the side of the building Thursday morning, the eve of Lag B'Omer, a Jewish holiday celebrating unity and freedom from persecution.

The words "Synagogue of Satan" were written on the Chabad of Staten Island, and across the street, the letters "SOS" were written on the Yeshiva Zichron Paltiel of Staten Island, referencing the aforementioned phrase.

Residents and members of the Jewish community were joined by local elected officials, NYPD Assistant Chief Kenneth Corey, borough commander of Staten Island, and the Staten Island Hate Crimes Task Force.

Rabbi Moshe Katzman told the crowd that when he first learned of the graffiti on Thursday morning, he wanted to keep the vandalism quiet, and not make it a big deal.

After people started to reach out to him, and photos of the hate speech spread on social media, he made the decision to use this hateful crime as a way to spread kindness.

"For every act of evil, we need to double and re-double our acts of kindness and this is the only way we can continue our life," said Rabbi Moshe Katzman. "All we want to do is help another person, it doesn't matter who you are and what you are, what you look like, male, female, black, white, Spanish, Chinese. It's irrelevant."

He continued: "It shouldn't just be, 'Oh, it's only graffiti.' No. This graffiti on the walls is going to show us and teach us that we, a handful of Staten Islanders, the forgotten bor-



Rabbi Moshe Katzman, Director of the Chabad of Staten Island, hands out coins to give to charity as the "first act of kindness against hatred."

ough, isn't forgotten. We woke up. Sometimes they call us the bedroom community. We're waking up. And we will show the world we can get together. Look at this room. It's a Tuesday morning, look at this room. And we are going to do the right thing and I don't know exactly how to do this, but we got to do it."

PROPOSES STUDENT RALLY

Rabbi Katzman said the community needs to come together to send messages of kindness, teaching especially to young children. He suggested students from public and

SEE COMMUNITY, A6



"This was not just an offense of the Jewish community of Staten Island, it was an offense on all of us," Nicole Malliotakis said at the unity rally on Tuesday.



Rabbi Mendy Katzman, the Associate Director of the Chabad of Staten Island spoke at the rally. Photos by Shiira Stoll, Staten Island Advance



"We all have been attacked when there is an act of anti-Semitism, an act of bigotry towards any of our neighbors, or friends or our family on Staten Island," Assemblyman Michael Cusick said.



"Let us all remember to go about our day today and our days forward and show our true character by saying hello to someone, by shaking a hand, holding a door, that's how we're going to pay it forward," Assemblyman Michael Reilly said.

Community

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private schools join together for a rally before the school year ends.

Rep. Max Rose, District Attorney Michael McMahon, Borough President James Oddo, Assemblymembers Michael Cusick, Nicole Malliotakis and Michael Reilly, and Councilmembers Joseph Borelli and Steve Matteo, spoke at the unity rally to encourage kindness and push back against hate.

To further condemn anti-Semitism, elected officials painted over the hate speech on the side of the yeshiva, using supplies provided by Matteo's Clean Team and Dennis McKeon of local nonprofit Where to Turn.

During the rally, Rose said that Staten Island is one borough and one family — defined by the rabbis, imams, pastors and civic leaders of the community.

"It's important that we condemn anti-Semitism today," Rose said. "I say that as a Jew, I say that as your congressman. But I also ask, as Rabbi Katzman alluded to, that we carry on with the full knowledge that we as a people are so much better than this."

'WE REFUSE TO GIVE IN'

Rose added that Staten Island is defined by its acts of compassion, not hate.

"We continue to lift each other up and we refuse to give in and let whoever committed that act of hate outside," he said. "We refuse to let them win because we will always speak to our better angels, we will always seek to come together and we will always seek to make sure that this country fulfills its values."

McMahon said his office has been working diligently to provide resources to the yeshiva, while the NYPD continues to investigate the hate crime.

"We're taking a stand for light, because

only light can defeat darkness," he said.

"We're taking a stand for love, because only love can defeat hate. We're taking a stand for all people and all religions that they can enjoy the benefits and protections of American society, our constitutional principles, the freedom of religion, the freedom of association, the freedom of speech and together we are taking that stand. We on Staten Island are taking a stand against hate and for love."

Corey asked for anyone who had information about the graffiti to reach out to the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-8477 (TIPS).

According to McKeon, the "SOS" graffiti will be removed from the school by the end of the week.

Incidents of hate speech are not uncommon on the borough, as the Advance reported on multiple instances of anti-Semitic graffiti found on Staten Island over the years.

Wagner College condemned the anti-Semitic graffiti, noting the rising number of incidents on Staten Island.

"Such acts have no place in our society and I urge the authorities to aggressively seek out and bring to justice those who have perpetrated these heinous acts," said Richard Guarasci, president of Wagner College.

Controversy rose more recently when Westerleigh residents began placing signs on their lawns that read "Westerleigh Strong." The motto was in response to Realtors asking Westerleigh homeowners to sell their homes. Some viewed it as a response to residents from the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, a largely Orthodox Jewish community, seeking to move to that section of the Island.

Opposition by some to an influx of Jewish residents grew, particularly after an eruv was installed in the neighborhood, which was quietly taken down.