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He saw an anti-Semitic message as he drove by. He did something about it.

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Former St. Thomas University student, Anthony Barroso, left, gets an award for his actions against anti-Semitism from President David A. Armstrong, J.D. at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens on March 2, 2021. ALEXIA FODERÉ FOR MIAMI HERALD

Anthony Barroso was on his way to work last week on Southwest 87th Avenue when he saw, scribbled with white spray paint on a red fence, graffiti that said, “Beware the Jews.”

It disturbed him that it was so close to his house and to the many people he loves who are Jewish.

Barroso, 27, sent a picture of it to his family and called Miami-Dade police to report the message as an act of hate. A few hours later, after his mom called to tell him the message was still there, Barroso took his lunch break, bought a roller, a bucket of white paint and painted over it.

“I just didn’t think that anybody else should have to see anything like that,” Barroso said Tuesday during a press conference at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, where he obtained his master’s in sports administration in December. He was accepting a recognition from inter-faith and civic leaders for standing up against anti-Semitism.

While it was a celebratory moment, what Barroso witnessed was just the latest of dozens of reported acts of anti-Semitic harassment and vandalism throughout Florida since last year. According to the Anti-Defamation League, which tracks hate crime incidents including those that target Jewish residents, there have been at least eight incidents of anti-Semitism in Florida in the first two months of the year, compared to five incidents over the same period a year ago.

On Feb. 12, also in Southwest Miami-Dade, a 9/11 memorial statue at a Miami-Dade fire rescue station was vandalized with a message that said, “Jews Did This,” referencing the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York.

During two separate Zoom meetings hosted by Temple Beth Or, a Kendall synagogue, cyber-intruders “Zoom-bombed” the gatherings by intimidating many of the elderly congregants with anti-Semitic messages and even threatening visits to their home.

Many of the incidents in the ADL report include verbal harassment in public places, graffiti of swastikas and anti-Semitic propaganda spread by different hate groups, including the New Jersey European Heritage Foundation.



St. Thomas University alumnus Anthony Barroso talks about what he did to combat an anti-Semitic message as he gets an award recognizing his actions at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens on March 2, 2021. Alexia Foderé FOR MIAMI HERALD

“The person who committed this crime is not emblematic of Miami. Anthony Barroso and his willingness to stand up to hate, he is Miami,” the ADL said in a statement shared by Shannon Walters of the St. Thomas University Jewish Law Association. “The anti-Semitic graffiti that tarnished a fence in Southwest Miami-Dade is both upsetting and offensive and we condemn it in the harshest of terms.”

The ADL has not released its annual audit of incidents for 2020, but according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, another advocacy group tracking hate groups across the United States, the organization registered 68 hate groups in Florida in 2020, more than every other state in the country except California. There also has been a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes amid the coronavirus pandemic.

“Hate and bigotry cannot be tolerated, not here in Miami Gardens, not here in Miami-Dade County and not here in the United States,” said Miami Gardens Mayor Rodney Harris, who attended the event on Tuesday. “We must heed his example and fight against bigotry and hatred.”

Barroso, who works as a marketing and events assistant at an organization advising teens who want to pursue college sports, said he was overwhelmed by the attention. In the time Barroso saw the message and painted over it, the photo had circulated online, prompting a news crew to show up at the scene and catch him painting over it.

“Compartir y convivir. The direct translation of that is share and coexist,” Barroso said, alluding to a saying he often heard from his grandfather. “We need to be able to share our community, we need to be able to coexist with each other and empower each other to continue to be there.”

His mother, Ana Barroso, said she was a proud parent.

“I feel very proud, very proud of everything he’s done,” she said. “Of living his faith and living his morals and not waiting for others to do it. That he took the initiative to do what he had to do.”