

PISTONS

Pistons continue efforts to educate, affect change in visit to Holocaust museum



Mike Curtis

The Detroit News

Published 5:59 p.m. ET Jan. 27, 2023 | Updated 5:59 p.m. ET Jan. 27, 2023

Farmington Hills — Around 100 Pistons employees visited the Zekelman Holocaust Center on Tuesday, in an effort to continue educating and raising awareness against prejudice and antisemitism.

It was a continuation of the Holocaust Center's 35th Anniversary Benefit dinner in November, when Pistons vice chairman Arn Tellem and his wife, Nancy, were honored for their community work within Detroit.

Staffers received a tour of the museum, a personal story from a Holocaust survivor and a panel discussion highlighting the importance of understanding and allyship between people of all races and religions.

The discussion was moderated by Stefen Welch, Pistons vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion, and the panelists included Rev. Wendell Anthony, pastor of Fellowship Chapel and president of the Detroit chapter of the NAACP, Samar Shousher, a premium-ticket sales executive with the Pistons, and Rabbi Eli Mayerfield, chief executive officer of the museum.

"I'm just so thrilled that everybody was able to take the time to come," Mayerfeld told The Detroit News. "I really salute the Pistons for being willing to set aside the time in everyone's workday to do something like this. It's terrific because there's a real opportunity for learning and I think that's what everybody found out while they were here."

It's remembering. That's so important, and you have to do that through learning. You just can't be ignorant about it. You have to come and learn."

The event was held one day after the Pistons' 150-130 loss to the Milwaukee Bucks, a game in which fatigue played a factor due to the turnaround from the team's trip to Paris last week. Pistons players and coaching staff weren't required to attend the event, said Tellem, who urged them to stay home and rest.

The center has 20,000 square feet of space for its exhibits, including "The Boxcar," the method of transportation used to deport Jews to the ghettos, death camps and concentration camps in Europe. The staff was also guided through "The Timeline," a world history timeline with a separate lineage of Jewish history to contextualize milestone events.

After the tour, the Pistons' employees received a brief moment to process the information and artifacts throughout the museum before they were greeted by Sophie Tajch Klisman, a 90-year-old woman who survived the Nazis' Auschwitz concentration camp. Klisman is one of six survivors left in Michigan who regularly visits the museum to share her story.

Klisman detailed the horrific conditions that she and her sister overcame as children. They watched their parents die from starvation and disease in the Lodz ghetto at the start of World War II. She lost three members of her immediate family in one year, at the age of 11. After that, the Nazis evacuated her, her sister and her brother to Auschwitz. The Germans took her brother away, and she never saw him again.

The stories were devastating, but her resilience shined through the message, which is one that can now be shared and passed on.

"When you've now heard Sophie's story, you're a witness," Mayerfield said. "You can say, 'I was in the room with someone who was in Auschwitz,' and people 40 years from now — maybe even 10 years from now — aren't going to have a chance to do that."

Tellem, who lost relatives during the Holocaust, said the importance of the event was to continue to increase awareness about not just antisemitism, but prejudice and hatred amongst all groups.

"For us, the importance of today and what we're going to continue to do is to fight and do everything we can as an organization to lead our community in education and be an example of tolerance of all people and acceptance," Tellem told The News. "Opposing and fighting all forms of racism, hatred — whether it's religious, or any group — and to be a force in our community to bring people together, that's what our mission is."

The Zekelman Holocaust Center waived the admission fee to its museum Friday for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The museum is open Mondays through Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is located at 28123 Orchard Lake Road.

Admission is \$8 for adults, \$6 for senior citizens and college students, and \$5 for students.

Rockets at Pistons

Tipoff: 7 p.m. Saturday, Little Caesars Arena, Detroit

TV/radio: BSD/97.1

Outlook: Saturday's game between the Pistons (13-37) and Rockets (11-38) will be a matchup between the two teams with the worst records in the NBA. The Pistons are coming off a win over the Brooklyn Nets, while the Rockets have lost their last two games. It is the first meeting between the two as Detroit will visit Houston on March 31.

mcurtis@detroitnews.com

Twitter: @MikeACurtis2