

White Rose Tribute Event Acceptance Speech – 4/27

I'd like to start by saying what an honor and privilege it is to accept this year's Tess Wise White Rose Award.

To be added to the long illustrious list of the previous award recipients is extremely humbling. So many prominent and respected individuals and organizations that I personally deeply admire grace this list... and all of them have made such a tremendous impact to our Central Florida Community.

I wish to sincerely thank everyone at the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida and their entire organizing committee for this prestigious recognition and for putting on this amazing annual event.

For more than 75 years, we at Florida Blue have been serving the citizens of Florida working towards our mission of helping people and communities achieve better health.

As part of that commitment, we recognize that it truly takes a village of partnerships, collaborations, and teamwork to make things happen and move the needle towards positive change. Ultimately, we rise and fall as one. We're all in this together!

That's why we're extremely proud to be long-time supporters of the Upstanders middle school anti-bullying initiative.

Rooted in Holocaust Education, the UpStanders Program challenges students to study one of the world's paramount examples of prejudice in order to understand the role each of us play in shaping a better future.

Since its inception in 2010, the UpStanders Program has been provided to more than 25,000 students in 68 schools, located in Orange, Seminole, Osceola, and Brevard counties.

We couldn't be more proud to support such an amazing and impactful program that mirrors many of our very own principles and values.

At the core of who we are as an organization, we're fully committed to educate and help alleviate hatred, prejudice, and discrimination of any kind in the many communities we serve and beyond.

Unfortunately, more and more of late, we continue to see a rise of individuals and groups attempting to spread antisemitic and hateful messages throughout our great nation, our region, and sadly, even here locally.

The work of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center, and the many organizations like it, is now more important and critical than ever.

We must always remember, and never forget, the important and tragic lessons taught to us by the Holocaust. As the great Winston Churchill stated: "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Our country has and always will be a symbol of democracy, freedom, and opportunity. As Americans, we must remain united in our commitment to stand up to hate, bigotry, discrimination and oppression in any form and wherever it is found.

Out of tragedy, we'll find hope. Where there's ignorance, we shall educate. And when there's silence, we will shout!

Hate speech against any religious or ethnic group is wrong. Florida Blue, and our parent company GuideWell, will not stand silent when it occurs, particularly when it happens in our own hometown, the City Beautiful, where we live, work, and raise our families.

Our company, like our colleagues represented here today, embraces a culture that accepts and celebrates our differences, and we are committed to ensuring that the diverse communities we serve know they have our unwavering support.

Together, we must continue to build a community of empathy, inclusiveness, and respect. Only then, can we truly grow, blossom, and thrive like the symbolic white rose we so cherish.

I'd like to leave you with a few other thoughts. Many of you know that I'm an avid reader and a famous quote that I frequently share is from the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who stated, "the greatest tragedy in our current social system is not the so-called noisiness of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."

And finally, one of my favorite books is called the Anatomy of Peace and the theme of this book is reflected in this one section; In the way we regard our children, our spouses, neighbors, colleagues and strangers, we choose to see others either as people like ourselves or as objects. They either count like we do, or they don't. In the former case, since we regard them as we regard ourselves, we say our hearts are at peace towards them. In the latter case, since we systematically view them as inferior, we say our hearts are at war. Heart at peace – others are people; hopes, needs, cares, and fears as real to me as my own. Heart at war – others are objects; viewed as obstacles, vehicles and irrelevancies.

I hope we can choose to leave here tonight and treat others with a heart at peace.

Thank you!