



## Nazareth honors its 1 and only Olympic medalist

By John Best | For [lehighvalleylive.com](http://lehighvalleylive.com)

The story of one man's determination and effort, which earned him a silver medal while competing against the world's best athletes, begins in Nazareth.

At Monday's Nazareth Borough Council meeting, officials recognized Joe Kovacs, whose 21.78-meter (71 feet, 5.5 inches) shot put throw at the Rio Olympics was second only to U.S. teammate Ryan Crouser.

"The reason I got to where I was," Kovacs said regarding the Summer Games, "is because of the community of Nazareth and the schools I went to."

Kovacs attended Holy Family School in Nazareth and then went on to graduate from Bethlehem Catholic High School in 2007.

"The Borough of Nazareth has never had a resident qualify and compete in any Olympic Games, making this endeavor not only noteworthy but truly historic," Mayor John Samus said.

Admirers, residents and some of Kovacs family members packed the meeting room Monday night. After the recognition ceremony, he spent about a half-hour greeting fans, taking pictures and draping his silver medal around the necks of those who asked.

The 27-year-old shot-putter has amassed a number of other accolades and awards in his career, including being the 2015 International Association of Athletics Federations shot put champion.

The Olympic medalist said he will soon travel back to his current home in California to begin training so he is in shape to compete at the IAAF World Championships next year in London.

Kovacs said some people have asked him if he is the biggest person to come from his hometown. He explains to them that Nazareth has been home to some other big names in sports.

"I might be the biggest (physically) but I got this guy Mario Andretti up the road," Kovacs said. He said he plans to work toward another Olympics appearance in 2020 in Tokyo.