

COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING MEMORIAL

Overview

The shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton Colorado touched us all. As a community and nation, we were in shock or disbelief that such a senseless act could take place in our community. At first, there was an outpouring of flowers, notes, poems, ribbons, stuffed animals, pictures and other objects brought to Clement Park to pay tribute to those that died, were injured or traumatized. From that initial outpouring of emotions and disbelief came the concept of establishing a permanent public memorial near the high school, a memorial that would serve to honor those innocent victims but also provide a historic record of this tragedy and to deliver a message of hope for many generations to come.

The site of the Columbine Memorial was dedicated and opened to the public on September 21, 2007 to honor and remember the victims of the April 20, 1999 shootings at Columbine High School.

Today the Columbine Memorial stands as an open, public place for all to visit and reflect on the impact and lessons learned from this tragedy. The Columbine Memorial is located in Clement Park which is located at 7306 W. Bowles Avenue (at Pierce St.) in Littleton, Colorado providing a stunning, but peaceful outdoor setting for visiting and personal / family reflection. As one of the victim's parents put it "Upon leaving this Memorial, a parent's first reaction will hopefully be to hug their child, and tell them they love them."

The Memorial

Visitors will find the memorial at the southeastern edge of Clement Park which is located at 7306 W. Bowles Avenue (at Pierce St.) in Littleton, Colorado.

A short gentle decline as you cross the threshold into the memorial emphasizes the solemnity of the creating a quiet, respectful demeanor.

The interior of the memorial is an oval stone outer wall (the Wall of Healing) which is softened by a grove of trees in the center and low native plantings around the edges. Steep landforms of the existing hills gently fold back from the top of the outer retaining wall. These hills surround a majority of the memorial, embracing, comforting and protecting the visitor and the community. As the memorial elements are revealed, the visitor notices the inner Ring of Remembrance, and the outer Wall of Healing.

At the core of the memorial, an intimate grove of trees grows out of an oval of intricate landscape and stone paving. The leaves soften the light surrounding the Ring of Remembrance. This low elegant wall of stone invites you into a circle of

stories. The stone is etched with words that are individual narrative remembrances of the deceased victims; remembrances by the victim's families. While reading the remembrances, the visitor may be comforted by the sound of water coming from the nearby fountain. An intricate ribbon design fills the center space and hugs the Ring of Remembrance. The tails of the ribbon, inscribed with the phrase "Never Forgotten" frame a connection to the outer Wall of Healing becoming a symbolic link between the community and the deceased.

Forming the remaining structure of the memorial is the outer Wall of Healing. Native Colorado stone forms the space for the memorial out of the embracing hills and is etched with the words of the community. A variety of general text gathered from interviews of students, teachers, the injured and their families, and other community members tell diverse stories of healing, changes in the community, and hopes for the future. The Wall of Healing starts near the entrance to the memorial and climbs towards the back wall where the majority of the general text is found. Low groupings of native shrubs and flowers soften the stone and create an inviting garden environment. Benches are located in welcoming areas to allow the visitor to sit in reflection and contemplation.

There are overlooks along and on top of Rebel Hill providing panoramic views to the Rocky Mountains, the eastern plains and the Columbine community. A walkway arcs along the top edge of the hills and connects the overlooks while providing an accessible route to the dramatic views on top of Rebel Hill.

The exit to the memorial moves the visitor back through the entrance corridor and once again directs their view towards the Colorado foothills.

The Columbine Memorial Foundation, Inc., a non profit organization, was formed in March 2009 after the Columbine Memorial Committee completed construction of the Memorial and disbanded. The Columbine Memorial Foundation's mission is to keep the Memorial the place of beauty, peace, reflection and remembrance it was intended to be. The Foundation coordinates and facilitates maintenance, volunteer efforts, repairs, improvements and fundraising for the Columbine Memorial.

Development History

Planning Process

Three and a half years after the tragic Columbine High School shootings, the Foothills Foundation and the Columbine Memorial Committee unveiled the conceptual design for a permanent community memorial. The design evolved from a clearly defined participatory process that followed a four-level diagram. Decision-making and design centered first around those most affected by the tragedy -- the families of those killed. The second established priority addressed injured individuals and their families. The third tier of design workshops and survey data collection was held with past and present high school students, staff and faculty. A fourth level of involvement brought community members into the process through surveys and an open house. The Columbine Memorial design process was developed utilizing

feedback from those four distinct levels of participation. The emphasis was always on those that were most directly affected by the tragedy. The evolution of the design responded to the priorities established from input and represents the Columbine area community in its forms, ideas and materials.

Goals

In order to elicit the ideas and elements that were most important to the victims' families, the design team presented a range of existing memorials both historical and contemporary and examined with the participants why particular elements created strong emotional reactions. Workshop sessions over a two-year time frame eventually forged a common vision for the memorial plans and fostered development of a high level of trust and dialogue between the design team and involved groups. With the evolution of these sessions, a number of common themes were revealed among the different groups. The outgrowth of the workshop sessions and community involvement was that the overarching goals of the memorial would be as follows:

- to create of a respectful place where family members, members of the community and visitors could go to gain an understanding of the innocent victims of Columbine.
- to create a memorial with content and purpose 100% derived from members of the Columbine community, and keeping with the scale, materials and natural forms found in the Columbine area.
- to recognize and honor the deceased, the injured, the survivors and the community members.
- to incorporate the Columbine "Never Forgotten" Ribbon in the concept design for the memorial. In the years since the tragedy, the Columbine ribbon had become a symbol of community unification and strength. The "Never Forgotten" Ribbon would be re-created in the paving or landscape patterns of the memorial.

Construction Process

Groundbreaking for the Columbine Memorial took place on June 16, 2006 with construction beginning in August of 2006. The Memorial was completed and dedicated on September 21, 2007