

INITIAL AND PERMANENT MEMORIAL SITES

Each time a crisis happens, there is discussion of a permanent memorial to honor the victims and create a place of remembrance. Many places around the country have had similar experiences and each location has come to create what makes sense for their community. This can often take years to discuss, design, and construct. Attached are several articles of the memorials that communities have created. However, in preparation for that task, some issues must be addressed.

Informal Immediate Memorials

It is likely that the public will create immediate memorials at a tragedy site by leaving cards, items, and photos at the location. It is important to find a way to collect those items until final decisions can be made about their disposition. Here are some suggestions from places that found a way to address that challenge.

1. In Aurora, Colorado, the city museum of history collected items, packaged them with museum quality materials, and catalogued each item. Items that were left to honor a specific victim were offered to the family of the victim. The family could determine whether to keep an item, whether to have it disposed of, whether to donate it to a permanent memorial, or decide they were not yet ready to make a decision. Items not left in memory or honor of a specific victim were sorted, packaged, and may be used in a permanent memorial.

2. In Oklahoma City, many of the thousands of items left on a chain link fence at the site were kept on the fence and portions of the fence remain as a permanent display. The other items were placed into a permanent museum that was built at the site and are on display for the public.

Pre-Planning for a Permanent Site

The planning process for a permanent site is time intensive. The World Trade Center memorial was not completed until 2011, 10 years after the tragedy. Oklahoma City's Memorial took over 5 years to complete. Dallas, Texas spent over 20 years determining what to do with the site of the assassination of President Kennedy. Columbine dedicated its memorial 8 years after the Columbine High School tragedy. Many other tragedies may be in communities where site planning is not as extensive, expensive, or time consuming. However, this process should be expected to take many years. Some things to consider are: wishes of the families; location; funding; legal concerns; and respectful design. Saving or destroying an actual building can be a divisive discussion. At Columbine High School, the school was redesigned. At Sandy Hook, residents of the

community voted overwhelmingly to tear down and re-build the school. In Dallas, the Book Depository became a museum of the event and history of the time. Each community needs to take time to seek input to make decisions that reflect their victims and their communities. Often memorials include healing areas. At the Columbine High School shooting memorial they have included a “Ring of Remembrance” and a “Wall of Healing.” In Oklahoma City tremendous planning went into the symbolism of each part of the memorial. There are the “Gates of Time” marking the exact time of the bombing. They also have the “Field of Empty Chairs,” “The Survivor Tree,” “The Reflecting Pool,” “Rescuer’s Orchard” which surrounds the grounds, and a “Children’s Area.” Each area is strategically designed and placed as a portion of the entire memorial. Whatever the decisions may be, it is wise to take the time necessary to fully evaluate all options.

Permanent Site

If the victims and the community decide a permanent site should be created, and all of the work has been done to achieve that memorial, a public opening is advised. Prior to the public opening, the victims and families need to be given private time to view and experience the site without the constant eyes of the public or the press.

To find out more about specific memorials, planning, funding, and symbolism, several articles have been provided. They can be located in the “Additional Resources” section.

Columbine High School Shooting Memorial

Oklahoma City National Memorial

Oklahoma City Memorial – a visitors perspective

Boston Marathon article – “What Should We Save?”

Sixth Floor Museum – Memorial to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy

Station night club memorial

Visit www.911memorial.org for a complete overview of the World Trade Center Bombing Memorial