
SACRAMENTO COUNTY



SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

JOHN MCGINNESS

Sheriff

February 4, 2008

Ernie Owen, President
Association of Sacramento County
Sheriff's Department
Veterans and Employees
1700 I Street, #100
Sacramento, Ca., 95814

Dear Mr. Owen (*Ernie*)

I recently learned you were interested in hearing the story behind the STAR VI memorial at Lake Natoma. As the Commander of the Bureau at the time of the crash, I along with a committee of Sheriff's Department employees and surviving family members were directly involved in erecting the monument. The following is a description of how it came to be.

On July 13, 2005, Sheriff's helicopter STAR VI crashed on the north side of Lake Natoma, near the Hazel Avenue Bridge. The crew, which was comprised of the Pilot, Joe Kievernagel and Tactical Flight Officer (TFO), Kevin Blount lost their lives in the crash and the third passenger TFO prospect, Erik Henrickson was gravely injured. The cause of this crash was later determined to be a catastrophic engine failure. While the loss of these lives and the wounds to Kevin has forever scared the department and community, the members of the Air Operations Bureau felt the need to build a monument where people could go to reflect on the positive contributions of these heroic men.

With a carefully selected committee in place, the members began with this mission:

To design, construct and dedicate a memorial that appropriately honors the memories of Joe, Kevin and the suffering of Erik, while maintaining the professional standards of the Sheriff's Department, the emotional welfare of the families and the interests of the community.

Our original goal was to dedicate this memorial on the anniversary of the crash, as close to the actual site as possible. However, during a site survey, we determined the actual crash occurred in a riparian area, which was not appropriate or readily accessible.

This led us to the ultimate site, which is in the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area at Lake Natoma. This area is a multi-use facility along the American River Parkway, located on the south shores of Lake Natoma, near the CSUS Aquatic Center.

Once we identified the location, the committee started on the design. To assist in the design process, we reached out to one the region's most recognized artists, known for his award winning bronze sculptures, Tom Bennett of Bennet Sculptures. His task was to develop an abstract figure that embraced the freedom of flight, while encompassing symbolic features unique to STAR VI. Tom took to the task immediately and came back with a design that needed no revision.

Consistent with the committee's requests, Tom incorporated a circular feature to represent the enclosed tail rotor of the Sheriff's Eurocopter helicopter. Tom not only accommodated this request, but also included ironic, albeit unintentional features that remind us of the men aboard STAR VI. For instance, the fins encircling the middle section form the number "6". These same fins number three, representing the number of crew aboard STAR VI on the final flight. The result is a bronze sculpture, titled by the committee, "*Hero's in the Sky*", coined from a statement made by then Sheriff Lou Blanas during a press conference.

With the preliminary design complete, the committee set out to secure the location, raise the necessary funds and build the final monument. As with any project of this size, we faced many challenges, not the least of which was to negotiate through the "red tape" of state government to place the memorial in a state park. With full cooperation from the State Park system, we secured an unprecedented agreement to place the monument in the park, directly across from the crash site.

On the heels of this success, members of the committee secured funding through generous donations of time, materials and money from members of the community and department. The result was a project on time and under budget.

On July 13, 2006, on the one-year anniversary of the crash, hundreds gathered at the memorial site with the sound of music in the background and smell of barbeque in the air when we unveiled and dedicated the fruits of our labor. The tribute to the men aboard STAR VI will forever stand as a reminder of their sacrifice.

Other interesting facts about the memorial

Material Used:

The sculpture, titled "*Hero's in the Sky*" is constructed of bronze with an antique patina finish. The base is made of hand poured concrete

Design:

The design is an original Bennett Sculptures design, made exclusively for the STAR VI memorial.

Location:

The memorial sculpture is located in the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, at Lake Natoma. It sits in a natural area at the east end of the parking lot, on the south shores.

Placement:

The memorial was placed to allow the visitor to look through the center circular section across the lake at the actual crash site. The lake serves as a reflecting pond, which along with its natural surroundings create an environment in which the visitor can enjoy serenity while reflecting on the lives of the crew.

Landscape:

The landscape surrounding the monument was created to allow 360-degree access to the memorial. The concrete path that surrounds the memorial forms the number "6" when viewed from above in either direction. This allows the surviving and future Air Operations members and all aviation personnel to look down upon the memorial in remembrance.

Contributions:

Without the generous contributions of the following community and department members, the STAR VI memorial would not have been possible:

Christo Bardis & John Reynen, Reynen & Bardis Communities
Angelo Tsakopoulos, AKT Development Corporation
Tim Berry, Berco Redwood-Berco Builders
Alice & Tom Bennett, Bennett Sculptures
Cameron Stoddard, Stoddard Construction
Robbie Geremia, Geremia Pools
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Sacramento Sheriff's K-9 Association
John & Margaret Anderson
Nimbus Landscape Material
Teichert Construction
Cornflower Farms
Green Acres Nursery
High Ranch Nursery
Pottery World

Ernie Owen, President
"711 Club"
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I hope this information is useful. I appreciate your interest in the memorial and encourage you and your members to visit the site. It is truly a fitting tribute to the crew of STAR VI.

Sincerely,

John McGinness, SHERIFF

Chief Deputy James E. Lewis
Correctional Services