



(Photo and story by Lisa Haring)

45 Years Later..

Annual Remembrance For Flight 191 This Saturday At Lake Park Memorial Wall & Garden

Saturday, May 25 marks the 45th anniversary of the crash of American Airlines Flight 191 into an open field north of Touhy Avenue and west of Mount Prospect Road claiming the lives of 273. At the time it was the worst commercial aviation crash in U.S. history.

Friends, family, the public, and those affected by the aviation disaster are invited to gather at the Memorial Wall and Garden at the north end of Lake Park along Lee Street in Des Plaines for an Anniversary Remembrance ceremony.

The program begins at 2 p.m. this Saturday with a call to gather followed by a presentation of colors by Des Plaines VFW Post 2992. At 2:55 p.m. Melody Smith, Jim Borchers, and Kim Jockl, children of Corrinne and Bill Borchers who were passengers on Flight 191, will address the dignitaries and attendees, and introduce the master of ceremonies, Gene Haring.

At precisely 3:04 p.m., all will turn toward O'Hare Airport Runway 32R to the west and observe 31 seconds of silence, the length of time the flight was aloft. A reading of the names of the 273 crew, passengers, and those on the ground that lost their lives will follow.

Ron Walerowicz, Chicago Fire Department, retired, and Jake Jakubec, Chicago Fire Department, retired, will ring the Bell of Remembrance 31 times.

The program concludes with a prayer and blessing by Rev. Fr. Michael G. Zaniolo, STL, CAC, chaplain for the Interfaith Airports Chapels of Chicago, and scattering of soil from the crash site in the memorial garden.

"After, friends and families can gather at the nearby Lake Park south picnic pavilion to reminisce and honor their loved ones, as well as meet the new generations of those affected by the crash," said Brian Panek, Des Plaines Park District superintendent for Revenue Facilities, whose staff maintains the Memorial Wall and Garden. Crayons and paper will be available at the Wall for stone rubbings and red 45th anniversary ribbons

will be handed out as a remembrance.

Parking along Lee Street and limited parking, which includes some handicap spaces, is available in the park district's lot adjacent to Lake Park on Touhy Avenue.

The Flight 191 Memorial was dedicated on Oct. 12, 2011, and came to fruition through the efforts of the 2009-2010 sixth grade class of Decatur Classical, a Chicago public school, in conjunction with U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-9th) and staff, State Sen. Dan Kotowski of Park Ridge and staff, the Des Plaines Park District, and the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago.

While brainstorming for a topic for Project Citizen, a national civic educational program designed to analyze policies and make a difference in the community, the Decatur students were moved by the heart-wrenching story of Assistant Principal Kim Jockl's loss of her parents on Flight 191 to create a permanent memorial.

"So many people in the community came together to help these students realize their national award-winning project and create a permanent home for this memorial," said Jockl. "We will always be thankful to Representative Schakowsky and State Senator Kotowski's offices who helped put together a manifest list and the Des Plaines Park District for donating the land."

Two hundred seventy-three bricks, inscribed with the names of those lost were laid by hand by Nilco Landscaping Solutions, in a design imbued with peace, tranquility, and reverence. The plaque at the site reads, "We Remember Flight 191 – Let us not forget the victims of May 25, 1979, who helped assure the safety of all who have boarded an airliner since that tragic event."

American Airlines Flight 191 was a Mc-Donnell Douglas DC-10 regularly scheduled domestic flight from O'Hare Airport, Chicago, to Los Angeles International Airport. As the plane took off, the left engine separated from the wing, causing a loss of control.

The plane crashed less than one mile from the end of the runway. As part of the investigation following the crash, the National Transportation Safety Board said faulty maintenance procedures at American Airlines as the reason the engine separated. Following, major reforms in maintenance practices and the engineering of planes were put into place.

At the 40th anniversary in 2019, more than 300 people gathered to observe the day and share their memories.

"Each year more people reach out to us on the American Airlines Flight 191 friends and family Facebook group to share their stories and talk openly, sometimes for the first time, about how that fateful day has affected their lives," said Jockl. "A new generation of children and grandchildren, first responders, flight attendants, and pilots have a place to reflect on those in their lives that are now only a memory," she said.

As the plaque says, "When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure." Author Unknown.