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45 Years Since Flight 191

Moments of emotion were evident during Saturday's service in remembrance of those who perished in the Flight 191 tragedy 45 years ago. The service was held at Lake Park in Des Plaines. Coverage continues on page 14 and 16. (Journal photo)

‘31 Seconds’: Common Bond Between Those Who Lost Loved Ones In Crash

Kim Jockl was handed a box with small items inside. At first glance she didn't know the story behind the objects.

Thirteen years ago following the dedication of the Flight 191 memorial at the north end of Lake Park in Des Plaines, John Hecker was executive director of the Des Plaines Park District. Then, like many times since, things like flowers and stuffed dolls have been left at the dedication wall. Sometimes, the identities of those who left the items are known. Many times they are not.

Hecker was somewhere in the crowd of people who attended Saturday's 45th anniversary of the crash of American Airlines Flight 191. That day he gave Kim the box and explained what was inside. “I couldn't throw them out,” he told her. Kim gladly accepted the package and said she will spread the word that they still exist and those who left them in honor of a passenger or loved one lost in the crash can have them back if they wish.

Said Kim, “I told my parents and the passengers, ‘please, no rain,’” Kim said later. She was praying to her mother and father and the 271 others who perished in the awful disaster. Her prayers were answered. The day was picture perfect without a cloud in the sky.

The plane was taking off from O'Hare Airport when an engine on one of its wings fell off. A half minute later after flying over Touhy Avenue west of Mount Prospect Road, the aircraft burst into a ball of flames when it hit the ground sideways. Two people on the ground also perished that day.

The rows of white folding chairs that had been set up in front of a podium were glistening in Saturday's sunshine. There were too many hugs and kisses to count. People had driven and flown in from out of state. The anniversary went without a hitch.



Off The Record
By Todd Wessell

Among the 17 who each slowly read the names of people who died 45 years ago, were a few students from Decatur Classical School in Chicago. They were among a group of bright 12-year-old students who 13 years ago brainstormed the idea of a Flight 191 memorial. They worked hard to make it happen, with great assistance from the park district and Des Plaines residents. Kim Jockl was the assistant principal at Decatur at the time. In five years when the 50th anniversary is held, those young adults will all be 30-years-old.

Kim explained that she and her sister Melody and brother Jim are already thinking about the 50th anniversary. At first, they were not planning to hold a 45th event. However, so many friends and families urged them to do so, so they did.

“The 50th anniversary should be a big moment,” added Kim, excited by the mere thought. “We still have 90 of the 273 families to contact. Hopefully we'll find more families.”

Annie Durkin, a flight attendant in 1979, was one of the readers at Saturday's solemn event. Four and a half decades ago she and a few fellow employees were having lunch at O'Hare on a layover when they were told that all were lost on Flight 191. Later that day, even though heartbroken, she and her fellow crew members went back to work. Their plane gradually picked up speed on O'Hare's runway ascending over Touhy Avenue and over the crash site. It was the same runway used by Flight 191.

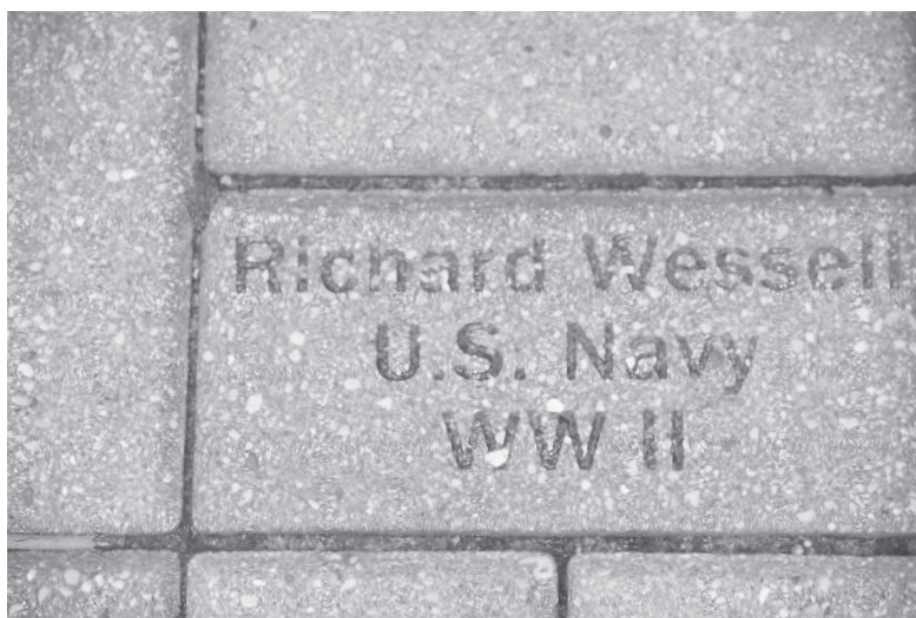
Another reader, Lisa Leark, said her son is now a commercial pilot and he still believes that flying is the safest mode of transportation.

There were a few tears Saturday afternoon. Some people wiped their eyes, others bowed their heads. Still others sat quietly, undoubtedly reflecting on that horrific day.

“We all have a commonality,” said Kim later. “And that's 31 seconds.”

Proud To Have Served

One of dozens of bricks that stretch out from the Lake Park Memorial Pavilion in Des Plaines that honor local men and women who have served. Richard Wessell, the former editor and publisher of the Journal & Topics, served in the U.S. Navy during World War II during the campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa.



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Family, Friends Remember 273 Who Died In '79 Air Crash



Cyrus Miller of Laingsburg, MI, etches the name of his deceased wife Gail who perished on May 25, 1979 when an American Airlines jet she was a passenger in crashed shortly after take off from O'Hare Airport. Taking Mr. Miller's photo is his current wife Patty Vanluven. Cyrus was also one of 17 who read the names of all those who died in the crash. (Journal Photos)



Kim Borchers Jockl, one of three siblings whose mother and father died in the Flight 191 crash, shares a light moment with friends following the 45th anniversary observance of the tragedy. It was held at Lake Park in Des Plaines and it was organized by Kim, her sister Melody and brother Jim.



Woman wraps her arm around a family member, while also holding his hand, who lost a relative in Flight 191 air crash in an open area just north of Touhy Avenue and west of Mount Prospect Road in Elk Grove Township.



Bagpipers play "Amazing Grace" near the end of Saturday's program at Lake Park.



A Chicago fire officer at last Saturday's anniversary of the crash of Flight 191 salutes the 273 people who lost their lives on May 29, 1979.



Catholic priest Rev. Fr. Michael Zaniolo spreads some of the soil at the site of the Flight 191 crash onto part of the memorial that was erected several years ago at the north end of Lake Park in Des Plaines.