

Lake Park Memorial Brings Peace To Loved Ones Of Flight 191 Victim

By [Lauren Barry](#) on December 27, 2017



Over three decades ago, Edward Armenta, then 22 years old, was on the way to visit family in the Los Angeles area when he perished along with 272 others during the May 1979 American Airlines Flight 191 crash.

After an engine separated from the plane and caused extensive damage, the jet plummeted into a field north of the airport just after takeoff. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the crash remains the deadliest recorded aviation incident in U.S. history.

Next spring, nearly four decades after the accident, Armenta's family will have a chance to remember him at the crash memorial located in Des Plaines' Lake Park.

A tree was planted at the park for Armenta this year, just before Thanksgiving.

"My entire life, it was kind of like I was chasing a ghost," said Joseph Armenta, Edward Armenta's nephew, who spearheaded the project to install a maple tree at Lake Park in honor of his uncle.

Though he was born five years after Edward passed away, the young Armenta felt a connection to the man he never met.

"His memory has been with us forever," Joseph said. "We're not a huge family. We all fit at one table. Inevitably, something will come up that brings up a story about Eddy."

According to accounts of family members and friends, the late Armenta was known as "Mr. Cool" and could often be seen driving around in a two-door convertible or playing tennis. Though he was the

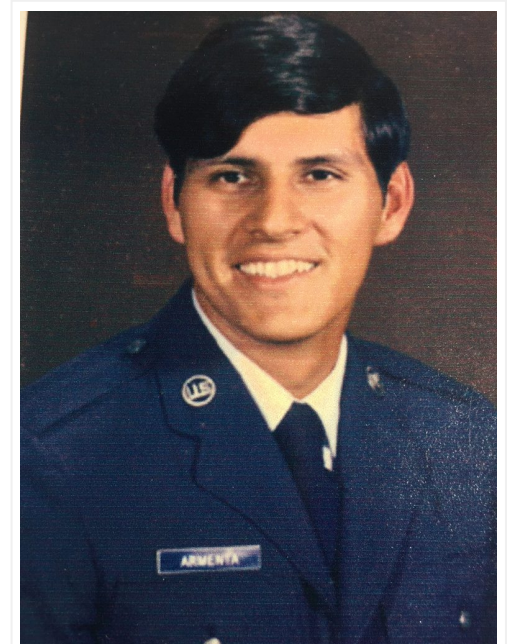
youngest of three brothers from a traditional Mexican-Catholic family, he was the tallest and the family trendsetter.

After joining the ROTC in high school, Armenta eventually went on to join the Air Force. Both of his brothers also decided to join the service.

“Everyone said he was just a really kind and outgoing person,” said his nephew.

Work with the Air Force brought Armenta to Chicago. Though not much is known about his life in the Midwest, Joseph Armenta said his family was once contacted by a woman who may have been Edward’s girlfriend.

Each year on May 25, the anniversary of the crash, the Armentas would tune into the History Channel or National Geographic, which would play specials about the incident. However, they were never able to see an in-person memorial for their loved one.



Edward Armenta

In 2010 students from Chicago’s Decatur Classical Elementary School decided to create a memorial for the 273 victims of the crash with their participation in Project Citizen, a national civic education program. With help from the Des Plaines Park District and elected officials, the students’ plan became reality. Today, the memorial includes a brick for each person who died in the crash, as well as trees dedicated to some of those who passed, along with special plaques.

It was not until 2013 that the family learned about the Flight 191 Memorial at Lake Park.

“From that point it was like, ‘I’ve got to go,’” Joseph Armenta said.

Since discovering the memorial, Joseph has been there twice, though most of his family has not. During his first visit, on a hot humid summer day, rainstorms stopped just as he left the car at Lake Park, his first destination upon arriving in Chicago.

“It was interesting,” Joseph said. “It’s definitely a positive and happy place, but it’s also very somber.”

When he brought back relics from the trip, including an impression of Edward’s brick, his family was brought to tears.

“My grandmother cried when she saw the photos and rubbed the impression of her son’s name when she saw it,” said Joseph.



Joseph Armenta at the Lake Park Flight 191 memorial.

On the second trip, he decided to reach out to the park district about planting a tree for his uncle. According to Joseph, park district staff treated him like family and “worked feverishly” to get the tree planted this year.

Thanks to an anonymous donation, all 10 members of the Armenta family are being flown out to see the tree at Lake Park next Memorial Day.

“It’s helped us be a positive part of my uncle’s legacy, and its brought us a great amount of peace,” said Joseph of the memorial.