

## 273 Lost, 191 Forgotten

### The Journey of the Students of Decatur Classical School

Our journey began about 730 days ago as we sat in our classroom, at Decatur Classical School, brainstorming topics for Project Citizen. Project Citizen, a national civic education program for 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students coordinated in Illinois by the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago, gave us the opportunity to look at issues in our community, analyze policies and try to make a difference. Timing is everything in this world. Mrs. Jockl, our assistant principal, walked into our discussion and with our teachers' prompting, told us the moving story of how her life dramatically changed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1979. Her story of the 273 lost and Flight 191 forgotten deeply moved each and every one of us and we all knew then and there we needed to try and make a difference.

In the months to come, we dove into endless research trying to understand the tragic and historic events of Flight 191. We discovered that this was the single worst air crash outside a terrorist attack, yet never recognized. With each piece of evidence and sad, personal story uncovered, we appreciated the depth of this tragedy and the importance to establish a memorial. Most of all, we learned that the Flight 191 tragedy not only affected the families, friends and colleagues who lost loved ones, but also the first responders, recovery teams and community members who played important roles in the aftermath. Additionally, it has affected all individuals who travel by air today, due to changes in safety and airplane maintenance procedures. We realized that memorializing such tragedies is necessary in the grieving process, and came to understand that when someone you love becomes a memory, that memory is a treasure.

In May of 2010, we presented our findings to a prestigious panel of experts that included Dave Davis from the office of Congresswoman Schakowsky, Thomas Demetrio from the law offices of Demetrio and Corboy, Teri Brady from The Federal Aviation Administration and Ted Gibbs from the office of Governor Quinn at the Dirksen Federal Building. These individuals were moved by the story we told, your story. Charged by Thomas Demetrio, of Demetrio and Corboy, we designed a memorial themed with the concepts of nature and

healing. Our project and your story gained local, state and national recognition. We continued our journey and met with Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky during the summer of 2010. Congresswoman Schakowsky was deeply moved by this story, realizing the need for this memorial and became a champion of our cause. She enlisted Senator Dan Kotowski and after several months, this beautiful location in the Des Plaines community was chosen. Nilco Landscape Solutions helped make our vision actually materialize and so today, we dedicate this meaningful and beautiful memorial.

Our involvement with Project Citizen and establishing this memorial taught us many things. We discovered that you are never too young to start making a positive impact on society and change is often the result of hard work and dedication. We realized that, “No--can’t--won’t--and too difficult” are not options when a wrong needs to be made right. As future leaders, we have learned the importance of listening to children for often they have important messages to share and hope to carry that notion into our adulthood. We sincerely thank the adults who took us seriously and rallied behind our cause. You have empowered us by taking the time to be our audience and supporters and gave us the sense that we can make a difference in this world. We have realized the importance of telling our loved ones how much they mean to us, for everything can change in a single moment. Establishing this memorial has given us critical life lessons.

Inspired by the words, “They deserve, we deserve, history deserves a memorial, today, October 15, 2011, the Decatur Classical Class of 2010 can respectfully say, “We Remember Them.”



For information regarding contributions for upkeep and ongoing enhancements of the Flight 191 Memorial, please contact Des Plaines Park District, Gene Haring, 847-391-5087 or [gene.haring@DPParks.org](mailto:gene.haring@DPParks.org)

To stay connected with individuals associated with AA Flight 191 and the Memorial, please visit: [flight191.org](http://flight191.org) or Andrew Cook at [1@arcook.com](mailto:1@arcook.com).