

Tri-Valley Herald

Danville school honors Pack children

Stone memorial dedicated in memory of Troy and Alana

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Wednesday, June 09, 2004 - DANVILLE – The short lives of two Danville children killed last year by a hit-and-run driver were honored Tuesday at a memorial dedication at Sycamore Valley Elementary School.

"As you hold me close in memory, even though we are apart, my spirit will live on, there within your heart," reads a plaque memorializing Troy and Alana Pack.

Several hundred students – from kindergarten through fifth grade – gathered with parents and teachers in front of the school for the emotional dedication ceremony.

"When we began this project back in January, our intention was to have a permanent tribute to our friends Troy and Alana," said Alyson Colton, PTA president and substitute teacher at Sycamore Valley.

"We did not want this to be a sad place. We want it to be a place of reflection, where kids could come and think of their friends."

The parents, teachers and children who came together to help make the

memorial a reality are symbolic of Danville's community spirit, Colton told the crowd.

"Let's hope this special place helps bring about some closure," she said.

The memorial, a curved stone wall with plaques listing Troy and Alana's names, birth years and the year they died, was built in to a gently sloping hill, taking advantage of the school's landscaping. A bench in front of the wall serves as an open invitation for people to sit and reflect.

"May we walk by here and appreciate all the things we do have," said Sycamore Principal Bob Scott. "And may we all be kinder to one another because of the that."

Troy was a fifth-grade student at Sycamore Valley Elementary, while Alana was in the second grade.

The siblings were riding a bike and a scooter on Oct. 26, 2003, when a 1979 Mercedes 300D jumped the sidewalk at Camino Tassajara and Rassani Drive in Danville and struck the children, court records said.

Alana, 7, died immediately and Troy, 10, died later that night at Children's Hospital Oakland.

Court records said Walnut Creek nanny Jimena Barreto, 45, was driving the car and fled the scene of the accident. She hailed a passing motorist, took a cab to the Walnut Creek BART station fled to San Francisco, according to reports.

She was arrested two days later in San Jose.

In May, a grand jury indicted Barreto on second-degree murder charges, in addition to counts of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated, driving under the influence causing bodily injury, felony hit-and-run, driving on a suspended license and possession of cocaine.

Barreto has pleaded innocent. She is scheduled to be back in court on June 25.

On Tuesday, the children's parents, Bob and Carmen Pack thanked those who attended the dedication ceremony for their friendship and the outpouring of emotional support.

"It's been a difficult year for all of us – especially the kids," Carmen Pack said. "We're sorry they've had to experience a tragedy at such a young age."

She said the memorial was a beautiful tribute to her children.

"It will keep them alive forever, and that means a lot," she said.

Addressing the crowd, Bob Pack recited a quote: "We try to teach our children all about life, but it is our children who teach us what life is all about."

Following the ceremony, children hugged the Packs and gathered at the memorial, shedding tears for their lost classmates. For many, it was their first chance to grieve openly.

Bob Pack's sister, Marjie Lynch, said not many children attended Troy and Alana's funeral for fear it would be too traumatic.

"They haven't been given the chance to openly grieve," she said. "For many of them, the finality of it all is suddenly sinking in."

Lynch, who has two children and two stepchildren, said she finds it a blessing just to sit and watch her children.

"If Bob and Carmen had the chance to look at Troy and Alana again, they'd trade their lives for it," she said. "But we're a strong family. One person has hurt a lot of people, but we're moving in a positive direction by being better people."

The Packs – backed by state Sens. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, and Jackie Speier, D-Hillsborough – currently are seeking to strengthen state laws dealing with drunken drivers.

As children crowded around the memorial and wept, many adults were struck by the youngsters' depth of emotion.

"I feel bad that they're experiencing such pain, but I'm happy to see they feel so deeply," said Teresa Cunha, a woman who witnessed the October accident and has since become friends with the Packs. "I'm amazed at their level of understanding."

Bob Pack said it pained him to see children so upset.

"I'm torn apart. They shouldn't have to experience such tragic emotions at such an early age," he said. "They don't know how to deal with it."

Many children asked the Packs to sign their yearbooks.

"I just want to say that I'm very honored you signed my book," said one young girl as Bob Pack penned a quick message.

Peggy Pack, Bob Pack's mother, said the display of emotion was "overwhelming."

"I didn't expect the kids to have so much emotion," she said. "It just shows how much they loved (Troy and Alana)."

Despite the grief, Bob Pack said he drew strength from the ceremony.

"It's motivating," he said. "Sometimes, in the afternoon, it can get lonely in the house and it gets you down. But seeing this is rejuvenating. It gives me the will to keep going on."