

Original URL: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/sep05/356867.asp>

Memorials draw complaints

To some, neighborhood shrines are grim reminders of crime

By **JOHN DIEDRICH**
jdiedrich@journalsentinel.com

Posted: Sept. 18, 2005

Drive through Milwaukee's central city neighborhoods these days and it's hard to miss the makeshift memorials of stuffed animals lashed to light poles, trees and traffic signs.

They are tributes created by family and friends to people killed there - in homicides, crashes or other tragedies.

Shrines with teddy bears, liquor bottles, photographs, crosses and candles have appeared on Milwaukee streets before, but not to this extent. Fueled by a spike in killings this summer, dozens of memorials now dot certain neighborhoods.

Some memorials have been up for months and are falling into disrepair, prompting complaints from residents who say they are eyesores and have become gathering places that foster trouble.

Family and friends of homicide victims say the memorials are special because it's the last place they saw their loved ones.

City officials are addressing the delicate issue, trying to balance sensitivity for victims with a need to keep streets and sidewalks free of what some consider a nuisance.

A city ordinance bans such objects left in a public place, meaning public works crews could simply take down the memorials. They have done that a few times, under police escort, after complaints mounted. At one memorial site, they faced angry comments from onlookers.

Time limits possible

Officials are forming a group to come up with a way to apply the law. The goal is to have existing memorials gone before winter, said Jeff Mantes, commissioner of the Department of Public Works. In the future, the memorials will likely be allowed for a limited amount of time, he said. "While you have to be sympathetic and allow families to grieve, you have to balance that with the needs of the community," Mantes said. "There are high emotions there."

Shrines show caring

Homemade memorials to the dead are nothing new in cultures in the Middle East, Latin America and Asia. In the United States, mourners have long put crosses or other remembrances alongside highways where loved ones have been killed in traffic accidents. In Wisconsin, the Department of Transportation allows such memorials as long as they don't cause a hazard or generate complaints, according to its policy.

Other cities have seen stuffed animal memorials to homicide victims for years. Los Angeles has had them for at least 12 years, but they generally don't stay up long and are removed by city employees if they become a problem, said Officer April Harding of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Memorials Spark Debate



Photo/Benny Sieu

Makeshift memorials like this one near N. 18th and W. Center streets, are becoming numerous in some Milwaukee neighborhoods.

In Milwaukee, the practice has become more popular during a particularly bloody year.

As of Friday evening, 91 people have been slain in Milwaukee, compared with 88 in all of last year. Forty-nine people have been killed since Memorial Day, when Elvis Jackson, 20, was gunned down near N. 19th and W. Clarke streets after an argument. No one has been charged.

For the past 3 ½ months, a tree near the site has been adorned with stuffed animals, including a giant green serpent reaching into the upper branches. A few liquor bottles lay below, among a cross and candles. A photo of Jackson is nailed to the tree.

"Every time I look out my door, I can't help but look at it," said Nichole Boone, a mother of four who lives across the street but is moving. "I hate the fact that I have to keep looking at it."

Romero Watson, 21, who himself was shot near Jackson's tribute on July 4, said the stuffed animals have strong meaning. "Sweet teddy bears show you care, you love them and miss them," said Watson, but added he wouldn't mind metal crosses to replace the perishable devotionals.

Police think Watson's shooting touched off a series of retaliatory killings. Romero Watson's brother, Darius Williams, 16, has been charged with shooting Terrence Watkins, 45, in the head as he rode his bike early on July 10 near N. 18th and W. Center streets.

Watson's aunt, Shirley Williams, 48, and his friend, Scorpio Rucker, 18, then were killed July 12 at a house on N. 20th St. south of Center St. No one has been charged.

Since his death, Terrence Watkins' family has maintained a memorial for him around a light pole on Center. His mother, Lillie Watkins, wants to wrap the large stuffed frog in plastic through the winter and plans to add more items in spring. It is one of three memorials in that block.

"We go down there a lot. I pray and talk to him. I feel closer to him there," she said of the site a block from her house. She said she would be "devastated" if it was taken down.

Area merchants object

James Smith, who works at nearby Sam Food, 1802 W. Center, said sometimes people mistake the memorial outside the store where he works for a homicide site. It was the spot where a 6-year-old girl was killed 18 months ago in a car crash. He said it is time for it to come down.

"It's a loss, but hell, you got to move on," he said.

A memorial to Joshua Pinkard, 17, killed May 10 in the 500 block of W. Abert Place, remains. After it caught fire and was ruined, mourners created another on a different pole.

Bryan Jackson, 26, who knew Pinkard, said Friday the shrines are good and it would be bad luck to take them down.

"I want someone to do that for me, at least that," he said. "This is love for him and there is still a lot of love as you can see."

Erskine Bowles, who lives nearby, sees it differently. He understands the need to mourn but said Pinkard's memorial has become a gathering place for his friends to party and cause trouble.

"It seems like they feel they have a right to be here," he said. "It's fine for a day or two, but after that it belongs in the cemetery."

'Looks like a morgue'

Ald. Michael McGee, who represents the area, agrees. He wants them makeshift memorials gone after 30 days and is planning to introduce legislation to require that.

"To me it makes our community look like a morgue," he said. "We have to find other ways to show that we care."

Common Council President Willie Hines, who also has a number of shrines in his district, said he respects the need of families to mourn but said the memorials are becoming blights.

"I understand their pain and suffering," he said. "I am hard-pressed to see how it adds value to the neighborhood."

No one has counted Milwaukee's memorials. Gracelyn Wilson, who works at Northwest Side Community Development Corp., began taking pictures of them for a project to honor victims. She stopped at 20.

"I had to stop," she said. "It was overwhelming."

Wilson, who helped make a memorial for a slain boy who came to her agency, said they serve a purpose but at some point they become depressing.

"It is fine for a short time but for months and years, it can be a little bit sad," she said. "There are other ways of remembering a person . . . They were more than a stuffed animal."

From the Sept. 19, 2005, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Have an opinion on this story? [Write a letter to the editor](#) or start an [online forum](#).

Subscribe today and receive 4 weeks free! [Sign up now.](#)

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

(1/22/1990-Current)

Paper: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (WI)

Title: EUGENE KANE IN MY OPINION Memorials should be the least of our worries

Date: September 22, 2005

They are signs of the times, but not in a good way.

The growing number of makeshift **memorials** for young lives taken too soon by violence has started to make some Milwaukee officials concerned.

About the **memorials**, I mean. Not necessarily the deaths.

(Yes; that does seem twisted.)

The **memorials** are made of flowers, teddy bears, pictures and candles; you can find them at trees, light poles and traffic signs all across certain ZIP codes in Milwaukee's central city.

I have passed several of these **memorials** while traveling through areas of black Milwaukee; they never fail to make me sad.

Some of the **memorials** are quite affecting; the teddy bears tied to the tree at the one I regularly pass on W. Capitol Drive suggest the loss of a precious child.

The liquor bottles on at least one **memorial** strike me as bad form. Why not a pack of cigarettes and fast-food cartons, too?

There's already a city ordinance banning the leaving of objects in a public place, so thankfully this isn't the kind of issue some politician needs to make a name with by proposing yet another needless law.

To their credit, some city officials realize it would be bad form to just sweep up all the **memorials** and remove them from view. There's a sensitivity involved, mainly for the friends and family members who have managed to deal with their private grief over the unexpected death of a loved one due to violence by erecting a public statement.

During the spurt of homicides in Milwaukee this year, some people criticized the black community for not caring enough about the problem. I think the spike in the number of these **memorials** is a sign some people do care but are clueless how to solve things.

Homeowners and businesspeople who complain about the **memorials** have a valid point about the timeliness of any exhibit. Just think how annoyed some folks get with the neighbor who keeps Christmas lights up until March.

Ald. Mike McGee — the rare politician who has acted proactively to address the homicide rate with a successful gun buyback program — thinks all the **memorials** make the black community look "like a morgue."

(Well, if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . .)

Many foreign cultures have all sorts of customs and traditions built around the inevitability of death. Black people in America, it seems, are no different.

I think a gaudy **memorial** for a loved one's death shouldn't be mistaken for a permanent thing. It's more like the T-shirts with faces of homicide victims that have become popular in the black community during funerals.

Eventually, you have to take the T-shirt off and get on with life.

But the presence of all these **memorials** could do some good if they were truly taken seriously as the sign of a turning point in that particular neighborhood.

If the **memorials** sparked a sincere movement in the black community to eliminate all gun violence, block by block, I'd recommend not only making them permanent but casting them in stone.

Regrettably, with 92 homicides so far this year, that doesn't seem to be the case.

I suspect as cold weather arrives, the debate over most of these makeshift **memorials** will be gone like fallen leaves. It will likely prove way easier to take down old **memorials** than to keep more people from killing each other.

That makes me kind of sad, too.

Call Eugene Kane at (414) 223-5521 or e-mail: ekane@journal sentinel.com

Copyright 2005, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. (Note: This notice does not apply to those news items already copyrighted and received through wire services or other media.)

Copyright (c) 2005, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. (Note: This notice does not apply to those news items already copyrighted and received through wire services or other media.)

Author: EUGENE KANE

Section: B News

Page: 01

Copyright (c) 2005, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. (Note: This notice does not apply to those news items already copyrighted and received through wire services or other media.)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Moving On

Roadside Memorials Bring Grief Closer To Home -- Some Say a Little Too Close

By Jeffrey Zaslow

1 September 2005

D1

(Copyright (c) 2005, Dow Jones & Company, Inc.)

PAUL HOOPER'S HOME in Poolesville, Md., faces a makeshift memorial to two teens who died in a car accident on his street in 2000. For years, the teens' friends and loved ones would loudly honk car horns when they drove by. Mr. Hooper sympathized with their grief and tried to be understanding. But last year, as the honking continued day and night, he finally went to the town and asked for help.

Poolesville officials brokered a deal with the teens' families: a smaller memorial and no horn blasts. Mr. Hooper appreciates the compromise, but the memorial still haunts his family's daily life. His young kids "are concerned that there are ghosts here," he says.

Each year in the U.S., an estimated 4,000 to 8,000 new roadside memorials to car-accident victims are erected, based on data collected by the Maryland State Highway Administration. Makeshift memorials also go up when a child dies in a playground mishap, when a teen is shot in gang crossfire, when an athlete expires on a playing field, or when a colleague dies in the workplace.

These shrines have proliferated because people want to mark that person's existence in a world that often treats the dead as anonymous statistics. Though many people today don't visit cemeteries except for funerals, the spots where loved ones died are becoming sacred. Hispanic culture, which has long embraced such memorials, has influenced the trend in the U.S. The media plays a role, too: We saw flowers and keepsakes piled where John Lennon was shot, where Princess Di died, where the Sept. 11 attacks occurred, and we thought: Our late loved ones deserve that, too.

Highway authorities are sensitive to grieving families, and often allow memorials that aren't safety hazards or eyesores. Some states, such as Mississippi and Wisconsin, prohibit memorials on state roadways, but have unwritten policies permitting a grieving period, after which memorials are removed.

Delaware recently broke ground for a memorial garden at a highway rest area, hoping accident victims' families would come there rather than build their own memorials. But some families have responded that they prefer the actual locations where their loved ones died.

As more memorials dot the landscape, the backlash has grown. In Norwood, Mass., Laura Foley finds roadside memorials distracting, because they bring to mind her son, who died of cancer in 1995. "I think of sad memories when I should be concentrating on driving," she says.

Chris Beale of Columbus, Ohio, lives near a memorial to a young man who was murdered. The memorial includes a T-shirt wrapped around a carved tree. "My parents both died in intensive care units," says Mr. Beale, "but I can't put candles or a plaque in the vicinity of where they died." He argues that if everybody erected memorials, "trees would be covered, crosses would be everywhere, and hospitals would be chaos."

In Wilmington, Del., Peter Medwick has instructed relatives not to put up a roadside memorial to him if he dies in an accident; he even made his request public in a letter to his local newspaper. Memorials belong "someplace safe and peaceful, not on six-lane highways," he says.

Yet many people feel comforted being where a loved one died. "It marks where the person presumably went to heaven," says Stephen Couch, a sociology professor at Pennsylvania State University. "It becomes the connection between this world and the next."

Every few months, Gail Megaloudis Rongen drives up Interstate 64 in Virginia to the median strip where her daughter Nicole died in a car accident last year. "It's a sad place," says Ms. Rongen, "but it's a reality check. It helps me realize that, yes, she really is gone."

Nicole was a vivacious, 19-year-old soccer player at Virginia Commonwealth University, and her friends also go there to leave photos, notes and candles. Because they were parking on the side of the interstate and running through traffic to the median, state authorities asked that Nicole's marker be moved to the right side of the road. Nicole's family agreed.

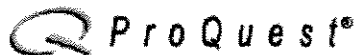
Memorials often serve as community gathering places. In 1991, John Gill, 23, shot himself in a secluded area near his family's farm in Miami, Texas. In the days afterward, 400 friends and neighbors visited the memorial at the scene, where symbols of his life -- his boots, his knick-knacks -- were displayed. "Some people came out of curiosity," says his sister, Elizabeth, "but a lot of people wanted to be at the place where this person they knew no longer existed."

Now a sociology professor at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va., Ms. Gill predicts an escalation in memorials in part because cemeteries are often far from where people live. After Jacquelyn Quiram lost her best friend in a 2003 accident, she channeled her grief by founding RoadsideMemorials.com, which sells solid oak crosses for \$79.95. Many mourners are too overwhelmed to buy materials to make their own crosses, says Ms. Quiram of Shorewood, Ill.

Marcii Magliulo of Penngrove, Calif., drove 15,000 miles last year following her daughter's college soccer team. Moved by all the roadside crosses she saw, she began leaving notes, asking families to get in touch with her. Many did, and she will include 180 of their stories in a book, "Crosses Across Our Nation," that she'll self-publish later this year.

The book won't include exact locations of memorials because of fears they'd be vandalized. "One man emailed to say he couldn't wait for the book to come out so he could tear down all the memorials," says Ms. Magliulo. The man wrote that the dead should be remembered in cemeteries, not along roadsides.

Ms. Magliulo encourages all of us to get out of our cars and take a closer look. "It's the saddest thing in the world," she says, "and yet, when you're there, it's a very peaceful feeling."



<< [Back to Document View](#)

Databases selected: ProQuest Newspapers, Ethnic NewsWatch (ENW)

[What's new](#)

Shrine to drive-by shooting victim gone ; Display removed in accordance with city's new 48-hour deadline

Heather MacDonald, STAFF WRITER. Oakland Tribune. Oakland, Calif.: Sep 25, 2004. pg. 1

People: King, Martin Luther Jr, Nichelini, Michael
 Author(s): Heather MacDonald, STAFF WRITER
 Section: *More Local News*
 Publication title: Oakland Tribune. Oakland, Calif.: Sep 25, 2004. pg. 1
 Source type: Newspaper
 ISSN/ISBN: 10685936
 ProQuest document ID: 699689371
 Text Word Count 431
 Document URL: <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=699689371&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=49175&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

Abstract (Document Summary)

Deputy police Chief Pete Dunbar told the review board that the shrines have become magnets for retaliatory shootings, traffic congestion, vandalism and loitering. Several shootings have occurred near the memorials, and earlier this month an Oakland man was killed while mourning a slain friend.

Nichelini, the son of Vallejo police Chief Bob Nichelini, used profanity when ordering Maxemiliano Montes, 17, out of his truck after citing the East Oakland resident for driving on a suspended license, according to the board's finding.

In addition, the board found Nichelini used his knees to hit Montes' head against the pavement. Montes was arrested on suspicion of battering a police officer, although it is unclear whether he was charged.

Full Text (431 words)

Copyright ANG Newspapers Sep 25, 2004

OAKLAND -- Less than 48 hours after Greshanda Williams was killed in a drive-by shooting, the street shrine honoring the 16-year-old Oakland girl was gone.

Williams' grandmother dismantled the impromptu memorial at 26th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way on Friday afternoon, after police officers advised her they would remove the Teddy bears, candles, pictures and cards before dawn Saturday in accordance with a new city policy.

Police believe Williams was not targeted by the shooter but was an innocent victim of violence in Oakland. Only scrawled messages of love and remembrance on the bullet-hole scarred building marked the spot where the McClymonds High School honor student died Wed-

nesday night.

A large crowd at Williams' shrine Thursday night forced police to shut down the southbound lanes of Martin Luther King Jr. Way for several hours. As the night wore on, several alcohol-related disturbances prompted the early closure of two nearby liquor stores.

The same night, the Citizens' Police Review Board endorsed the Police Department's new policy to dismantle street shrines for murder and accident victims within 48 hours.

Deputy police Chief Pete Dunbar told the review board that the shrines have become magnets for retaliatory shootings, traffic congestion, vandalism and loitering. Several shootings have occurred near the memorials, and earlier this month an Oakland man was killed while mourning a slain friend.

Board member Andrew Radlow said the policy was sound and would help protect Oaklanders. Joyce Hicks, the board's executive director, agreed.

In addition, the board voted unanimously to dismiss a complaint against three officers for removing a shrine a year ago from the corner of 31st Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way that honored Michael D. Thompson, whose killing police believe was gang-related.

The board ruled that Garlanda Byrd, Thompson's mother, had no cause for action.

In other action, the review board

sustained two of 10 allegations brought against Officer Michael Nichelini for improper verbal conduct and excessive force.

The board recommended Nichelini be suspended for two days and reprimanded orally for his conduct May 2. City Administrator Deborah Edgerly will decide whether to implement the punishment.

Nichelini, the son of Vallejo police Chief Bob Nichelini, used profanity when ordering Maxemiliano Montes, 17, out of his truck after citing the East Oakland resident for driving on a suspended license, according to the board's finding.

In addition, the board found Nichelini used his knees to hit Montes' head against the pavement. Montes was arrested on suspicion of battering a police officer, although it is unclear whether he was charged.

E-mail Heather MacDonald at <a

=<mailto:hmacdonald@angnewspapers.com>>hmacdonald@angnewspapers.com</ a> .

]]>

Copyright © 2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company. All rights reserved. [Terms and Conditions](#)

[Text-only interface](#)

ProQuest
COMPANY

CHICAGO SUN-TIMESwww.suntimes.com[Back to regular view](#)<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-vigil09.html>[Print this page](#)

Police remove shrine to shooting victim

*August 9, 2005***BY ANNIE SWEENEY** Crime Reporter

Flickering votives, stuffed animals and flowers are commonly left on city streets and sidewalks to mark the spot where someone was slain.

It's a way some choose to honor murder victims.

Over the weekend, Chicago Police on the Far North Side removed a makeshift shrine for a slain Evanston man over concerns that it glorified gang violence.

The move didn't sit very well with members of the community.

Officers from the Rogers Park District rounded up the stuffed animals, flowers and candles Sunday afternoon, angering residents gathered at the corner of Paulina and Jonquil, where Alex Vernon, 19, had been shot in the head hours earlier.

"This is how the community remembers the people," said Antonio Jackson, 32, referring to the corner shrine. The way the police reacted made the residents feel like "trash," he said.

Rogers Park Cmdr. Bruce Rottner said he had the vigil dismantled because the victim is an alleged gang member, which makes the shooting gang-related. And that increases concerns over retaliation shootings, he said.

"I understand this young man is somebody's son," Rottner said. "I told the people that . . . if they want to do something on private property, that's fine. . . . But we can't, on the public way, start erecting memorials to someone who is known to the police as a gang member."

Not department policy

Rottner declined to discuss Vernon's background in detail, but community members have disputed Vernon's gang involvement and said the shooting was over an argument with someone. No one has been arrested.

Rottner also noted that he, working with the alderman, agreed to close a portion of Paulina on Sunday morning so members of the Good News Community Church could gather outside for a service and make a public statement against violence.

Squad cars helped shut down the block allowing church members to move their altar and chairs into the street. There, the Rev. Marilyn Pagan prayed for Vernon, but also for the neighborhood, which has a violent history.

As the group prayed, friends of Vernon's gathered on the corner, some of them crying.

Michael Harrington, who has worked with police on improving conditions in this section of the district, known as North of Howard, has been pleased with a stepped-up police presence. But he disagrees with the shrine's removal, saying gang affiliation doesn't matter.

"Other people need to know other people care," he said.

<http://www.suntimes.com/cgi-bin/print.cgi>

8/23/2005

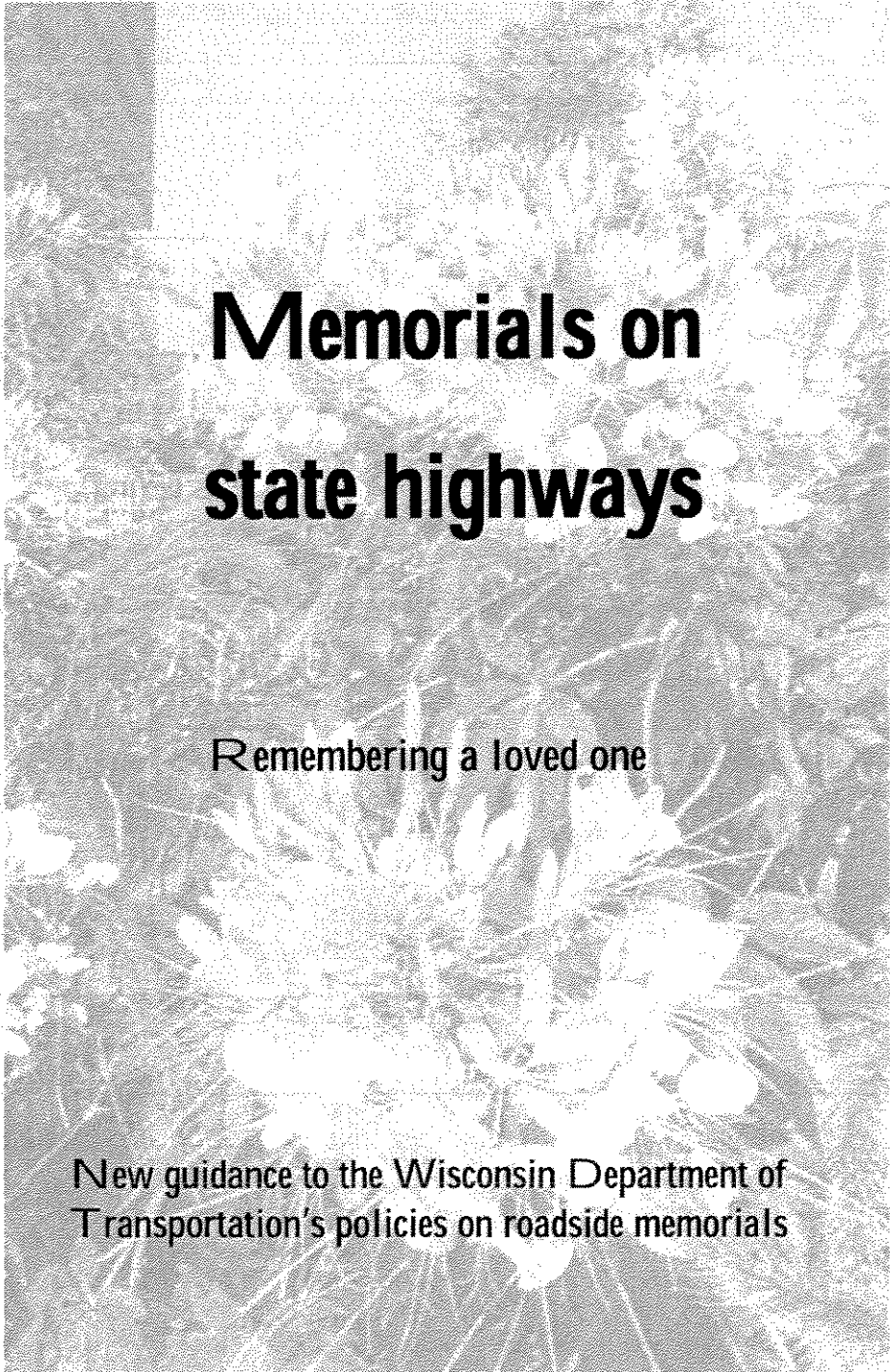
Rottner stressed that he is not enforcing a department policy -- it was his judgment call. He said shrines may be appropriate in other situations -- a car accident or the shooting of a young child, for instance.

Other commanders said they also handle makeshift shrines on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration how many people are gathering, how much noise is created and whether they cause traffic problems.

But they agreed gang influence has to be weighed -- are gang colors or symbols being used? Is the shrine in disputed territory?

Copyright © The Sun-Times Company

All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.



Memorials on state highways

Remembering a loved one

New guidance to the Wisconsin Department of
Transportation's policies on roadside memorials



Guidelines for memorials along Wisconsin roadsides

Loss of life from a traffic crash has a devastating impact on families and friends of the victim. A loved one is suddenly no longer with us. Wisconsin Department of Transportation and county highway maintenance employees understand the distressing shock of such a loss of life. They also recognize that some people grieve by placing a memorial within a highway right-of-way near the crash site.

While the department acknowledges the need some people feel to express themselves in this way, the placement of memorials within a roadway's right-of-way is not allowed under state statutes. Roadside memorials may also be a safety hazard.

What *can* I do?

Current policy for the department is to remove a memorial as soon as possible if it poses a safety concern, for example:

- If it interferes with roadway safety features or vision
- If it negatively impacts the free flow of traffic
- If it would be a hazard should it be hit

A memorial will also be removed if:

- It interferes with routine maintenance
- It falls into disrepair
- The department receives a complaint

Otherwise, the memorial typically will not be removed.

If a memorial is removed, the owner is contacted, if known, and told where it may be retrieved. Individuals should understand that any memorial placed on public right-of-way is temporary and should expect it would not remain in place for more than a year.

The department strongly encourages grieving parties who wish to place a memorial near the site of the fatal crash to work with an adjoining landowner to designate an appropriate location, off a road's right-of-way, for placement of a memorial.

Adopting a highway as an alternative

As an alternative form of memorial, the department allows friends and family to adopt a two-mile-long highway segment under the Adopt-a-Highway program with signage that notes that the highway has been adopted in memory of The sign is installed by the state in compliance with federal and state standards. Those who adopt a highway are required to clean their adopted roadway at least three times a year.

The benefits of this approach are that the deceased can be recognized in a manner that conforms to state statutes and allows mourners to positively affect Wisconsin's roadsides while giving them access to the crash site at least three times a year. They would not be allowed to maintain a separate roadside memorial.

Under special circumstances, the department has worked with grieving families to place plantings at a rest area near a crash scene. This has allowed mourners to gather together off the immediate roadway right-of-way to remember their lost loved one.

Safety is the department's highest priority

No one wants to see a subsequent tragedy result from a previous incident. For safety's sake, statutes require that only items that perform a specific highway function are allowed within a highway right-of-way.

Mourners who stop to maintain a memorial not only place themselves in danger, they also put other motorists at risk. Additionally, it's against state law to stop along an interstate or freeway except in an emergency or because a vehicle breaks down.



For more information on roadside memorials contact:

John Kinar

Phone: (608)266-1202

E-mail address: john.kinar@dot.state.wi.us

www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/rules/memorials.htm