

State's first police memorial breaks ground in Anniston

By Kirsten Fiscus, Star Staff Writer, kfiscus@annistonstar.com | Posted: Friday, February 26, 2016 4:52 pm

Hesitant at first, Jeniffer Morris picked up a shovel at the end of a line of city, state, and federal officials.

When Morris' son became a police officer, she said, she never expected to be involved in a ceremony for fallen officers.

On the count of five, Morris and all in line scooped up sand and tossed it for the groundbreaking of the state's first law enforcement memorial at Anniston's Centennial Memorial Park. The new memorial will include the name of her son, Justin Sollohub, who was shot during a pursuit in August 2011.

"Never did I imagine that's what he would grow up and do and that's where his life would end, but that was his passion," Morris said Friday, referring to a photo of then 4-year-old Sollohub wearing an Anniston Police Department shirt.

Sollohub's name, along with those of more than 500 other officers, will be engraved on the memorial and unveiled May 13, police officer memorial day, Oxford police Chief Bill Partridge said at the event.

"Every name of officers killed from the entire state of Alabama will be on it," Partridge said. "We are one of the few states left in the country without a state memorial. We are changing that."

While Partridge said he hopes to never have to add any names to the memorial, within 72 hours of the death of an officer the officer's name will be added to the wall. Within 48 hours of the officer's burial, a ceremony will be held to unveil the name, he said.

"This will be similar to the national monument," he said. "We are giving the families of those fallen officers a place where they can come and feel like they are visiting them."

The idea for the memorial started about six years ago, but became feasible after determining a way to pay for it, Partridge said. Partridge, along with other local law enforcement, came up with a specialty law enforcement license plate that would help fund the memorial.

"Within three years, we had the monument paid for," he said.

Many services were donated for the monument, keeping the cost at \$40,000, Partridge said.



Police memorial

“We had the architectural services donated and construction services donated,” he said.

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange said during the ceremony that he quickly learned the sacrifice of officers at Sollohub's funeral.

“That was the first police officer funeral that I attended,” he said. “I'd only been attorney general for two months and it was a quick and sobering lesson in the sacrifices that all of our officers make.”

Strange said of the 180 law enforcement agencies across the state that reported fallen officers, the Anniston Police Department was fifth on the list, with 15 officers in a 100-year period between 1911 and 2011.

“There is indeed a high price to pay for putting on the uniform of a police officer and this community knows about that sacrifice more than most,” he said.