



Public Information Office
602 S. Main Street
Joplin, Missouri 64801
417-624-0820 Ext. 204
417-625-4707 (Fax)
www.joplinmo.org

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUBJECT: Day of Unity offers remembrance, reflection, and dedications

CONTACT: Lynn Onstot, Public Information Officer
417-624-0820, ext. 204

After the 6,000-plus walkers arrived at Cunningham Park around 5 p.m. on May 22 from the Walk of Unity, they quickly filled chairs, bleachers and grassy areas for the concluding program of the Day of Unity. This special program at the park dedicated to remembering and reflecting on the past year. City Manager Mark Rohr welcomed a crowd of more than 8,000 people representing the community, volunteers, and local, state, and federal partners present for the program.

Hal Donaldson, keynote speaker and founder and president of Convoy of Hope, offered an inspirational message to the crowd. Through its world-wide operations, Convoy of Hope has brought aid to millions of people across the United States and around the world. Immediately after the May tornado, their trucks and relief teams arrived in Joplin and they have been here ever since: passing out food and water, removing debris, and rebuilding homes. Donaldson's message at the ceremony emphasized the importance of hope and faith for the future, noting Joplin and Duquesne focused on three important elements during the past year's recovery: hard work, unity and courage.

Donaldson's message was followed by a moment of silence at exactly 5:41 p.m., the time the tornado struck one year ago. This moment of silence allowed individuals to reflect on the lives lost last May and the events of the past year.

After the moment of silence, Mark LaPerle played the song that many heard last year during the one-week memorial, "Joplin's Heart Will Sing Again". Following his performance, three symbolic dedications were made: the presentation of the time capsules, the unveiling of the bronze memorial plaque, and the planting of the 161st tree.

The time capsules were placed in the base holding the bronze plaque. The capsules will be opened on May 22, 2061, the 50th anniversary of the tornado. This date was selected so that those who experienced the tornado as children could pass the living history onto children and grandchildren not yet born. There are a total of six capsules that represent “Our Youth,” “Our Seniors,” the “Class of 2011,” “Our Community,” the “City Operations,” and the “Media Response.” All six capsules are dedicated to the Citizens of Joplin in the year 2061.

- The “Our Youth” capsule contains messages from elementary students impacted by the tornado. Three students presented this capsule: Kaylenn Connor, 5th grader, Emerson Elementary; Morgan Keller, 1st grader, Irving Elementary; and Carmen Colson, 3rd grader, St. Mary’s Grade School.
- The “Our Seniors” capsule includes messages of Joplin’s history and hopes for the future and was presented by Dennie and Loretta Lynch.
- The “Class of 2011” capsule includes reflections on the year and offers inspiration to the Class of 2061. This capsule was presented by the Will Norton family.
- The “Community” capsule contains a 100 foot scroll with messages of hope, encouragement, and memories and was presented by Charlie Brown.
- The “City Operations” capsule represents the efforts of the City of Joplin and was presented by Keith Stammer.
- The “Media Response” capsule was devoted to local media and tells the story of how they told the story to the world and was presented by Josh Marsh of KZRG Radio, part of the Zimmer Group that broadcast live for nine days following the tornado on all of their radio stations to provide vital information to the community.

The second symbolic dedication was that of the Bronze Memorial Plaque. This plaque is inscribed with the names of the 161 citizens who lost their lives on May 22, 2011 and will be displayed in the memorial at Cunningham Park.

The final symbolic dedication was that of the 161st tree. This tree serves as a memorial to friends, family members, and citizens who were lost that day and will serve as a lasting reminder for generations to come. Two families were present to assist in planting this tree.

After these three dedications, Lynn Britton, President and Chief Executive Officer of Mercy Hospitals, made a dedication on behalf of Mercy.

As a gesture of “Paying It Forward” to help kick-off Star of Hope for Minot, Joplin Mayor Melodee Colbert-Keen passed one of Joplin’s stars to Dean Frantsvog, President of Minot City Council in Minot, North Dakota. Minot is a community that sustained major damage from flooding last June. *New York Says Thank You* and their *Stars of Hope* Program, which has been in Joplin since last September, will move to Minot this September.

After the dedications, the ceremony concluded with a community singing of “Go Make a Difference.” This song represented the community’s efforts thus far and encouraged citizens to move forward with a positive outlook.

Lynn Iliff Onstot
Public Information Officer
City of Joplin
602 South Main
Joplin, MO 64801
417-624-0820, ext. 204
417-438-2287 Cell