

Memorial crosses taken down

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The wooden crosses atop a hill near Columbine High School were abruptly taken down early Sunday by the Illinois carpenter who erected them just last week.

Greg Zanis received so many nasty telephone calls about the 15 crosses he planted at Clement Park - one for each of the 13 victims and two for the killers - that he drove all night Saturday and removed them early Sunday.

The 8-foot-high crosses that towered above the huge, heartfelt memorial in Clement Park have been controversial since Zanis erected them on Wednesday. Many people, including the father of a Columbine shooting victim, were angry that two of the 15 crosses represented the two killers. On Friday, Brian Rohrbough, whose son, Daniel, was murdered, took down the two crosses for Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17. Rohrbough said it wasn't appropriate to honor the shooters in the same place as the victims. Reacting to that outrage and negative barrage of calls, Zanis on Saturday made his second 14-hour drive to Colorado in a week. He took down the crosses at 6:30 a.m. Sunday, said Edie Hylton, manager of community service for Foothills Parks and Recreation District.

"He got in his car, he drove here and he took them all down. He was so disturbed by the reaction he got (to erecting crosses for the killers). He was trying to do something good," Hylton said. "It's a sad comment."

Zanis decided on his own to remove the crosses. Law enforcement officers at the Columbine command post were surprised to see them missing, said Steve Davis, a spokesman for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department. "When the sun came up (Sunday) morning, they saw the crosses were gone," Davis said. The hundreds who lined up to walk to the crosses on the Clement Park hill on Sunday were also mystified when they were missing. Photographs of the hill with the dramatic landscape of wooden crosses have been published in newspapers and magazines around the country.

"You build a memorial for someone, then you take it down? That doesn't make sense to me," said Wayne Haubenschild, who visited the memorial Sunday.

Haubenschild's wife, Holly, said she didn't like that crosses for the killers were on the hill. But she said she'd like to see the 13 crosses remain on the hill that overlooks the school and park.

"When you're up here, it's so breathtaking. This hill is symbolic," Haubenschild said.

Zanis was not available for comment Sunday, as he was en route to his home in Aurora, Ill. But his 16-year-old son, Chris, who helped erect the crosses, wished they were still planted in the park.

"People look at that (the crosses), and they know that violence is really bad," Chris Zanis said. "It helps them to let (their grief) out."

Zanis builds the crosses in the garage of his Aurora home, said his daughter, Maria. Her father hastily decided to leave for Colorado at 5 p.m. last night because "he thought the people were upset about them," she said.

Hylton said her office has received many calls about the crosses, too.

"We got calls in the office both ways, that they were glad to see the 15, and they were disturbed to see the 15," Hylton said.

Another visitor to Clement Park on Sunday, Aaron West, said it was fitting that the crosses were on the hill. "Hopefully, the crosses will be preserved for a museum or other kinds of tributes," he said.