

Crosses find home in Roxborough

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June 1 - DOUGLAS COUNTY - Thirteen tall wooden crosses found at least a temporary home Monday, in a peaceful meadow of Roxborough State Park, surrounded by rolling hills and tiny purple wildflowers.

The crosses stood in a row, each bearing the name of one of the victims of the shooting at Columbine High School.

Ron Aigner, who owns about half an acre inside the park, allowed the crosses to be erected on his property after weeks of controversy about whether crosses could be part of a permanent memorial at Clement Park, which is near the high school.

"The only tool we have is a piece of private land," said Aigner, who bought the land in 1974, before Roxborough was a park. "Only for this issue would I jeopardize this environment."

Aigner said he doesn't think the current memorial should be permanent. Instead, he thinks the crosses should be built in Clement Park. However, officials from the Foothills Park and Recreation District, which manages the public park, said no religious symbols can be in a permanent memorial there.

"Hopefully, this is just a protest to politicians," said Aigner. "This is not the place to do it."

Aigner wants to trade land he has in Roxborough for land in Clement Park. However, he said no officials are interested in the land swap.

So, for now, the crosses were erected on Aigner's half acre, which is in a secluded spot deep into the park.

Misty and Brad Bernall, parents of shooting victim Cassie Bernall, came to visit the peaceful site shortly after the crosses were erected.

"Cassie would have liked this," said Misty Bernall.

Cassie's father said before her death, his daughter had been learning to enjoy the outdoors.

"It's so beautiful and Cassie was just learning to appreciate a place like this," said Brad Bernall. The Bernalls came out to the site to meet Aigner and Greg Zanis, who built the crosses.

"From the bottom of my heart we all really appreciate their generous, giving hearts," said Brad.

The Bernalls prayed together with Aigner and Zanis and other volunteers who came to help put up the crosses.

Zanis is a carpenter from Aurora, Ill., who builds crosses as part of his organization "Crosses for Losses." He began building the crosses in 1997 after seeing his father-in-law and best friend gunned down. The organization has built 265 crosses in nine states, he said. He does not accept payment, he said.

This is the fourth set of crosses he's built and the fourth time he's driven out from Chicago to Colorado. The first time, he built 15, including two for killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Brian Rohrbough, whose son Daniel was murdered in the attack, took those crosses down.

Zanis then drove he drove back to Colorado and took the crosses home with him.

He later came back and built a second set of 13, but isn't sure where that set was taken when the memorial was removed from Clement Park. He came back this past weekend to build a third set of 13 which is now at Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens in Littleton.

He also built what he hopes is the final set of crosses, which may remain at Roxborough or be moved to Clement Park.

Aigner and Zanis erected the crosses in Clement Park for a few hours Monday morning before taking them down to bring them to the site in Roxborough. The site is several miles from the entrance of the park, off a winding dirt road.

Aigner asked people interested in visiting the crosses to walk to the site, rather than drive, and not to leave any items, to minimize environmental impacts.