

Montana Trooper

Trooper David DeLaittre Memorial Park

By Sergeant Patrick McCarthy

On December 1, 2010, the Montana Highway Patrol and the town of Three Forks wept when they learned Trooper David DeLaittre was shot and killed just a short distance from his childhood home. Soon after his death, a Christmas tree was placed at the scene, complete with lights and decorations. In the days following the funeral David's father Dennis DeLaittre (formerly MHP 205) began to plan a memorial park at the scene. Dennis secured approximately 3.5 acres from the Buttleman Ranch and began the process. There is a sign there visible to passing motorists about the sacrifice David made and the purpose of the park.

The dedication of the David DeLaittre Memorial Park was held on July 7, 2011. It was a beautiful summer day in Montana, complete with blue skies, hot sun, and more than a few tears. Highway 2 near the park was officially designated as the David J. DeLaittre Memorial Highway. Denny talked about the future of the David DeLaittre Memorial Park and how he envisioned children playing there, and maybe a sign telling motorists, "David says slow down."



Trooper David DeLaittre. Photo courtesy of Helmbrecht Photography Studio, Havre, MT.

As summer wound itself into fall, I found myself occasionally grabbing a sandwich in town and driving out to the park to have lunch. I can usually see some wildlife, hear the birds, and catch up on a little paperwork. This place of violence, at least for me, has become a place of solitude where the memories of the past merge with the visions of the future.

On December 1, 2011, a large group of people met again at the park. Dennis had installed an iron cross, and there were two Christmas trees complete with



blue lights, a police car, and a decoration for every Montana Law Enforcement Officer killed in the line of duty. Montana made a perfect background for the bagpipes with its blue skies and snow covered mountains to the west. Three helicopters paid their respects, two in a hover and a third flying a giant U.S. flag through the crisp air. All the officers in attendance lit their "cherries and berries" and observed a couple minutes of silence.

Throughout the last year, Dennis has been busy planning improvements on the park. He is working on another big cross complete with lights which will flash for twenty-four hours whenever a law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty and an electronic reader board which will display the

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name, agency, and end of watch date. On the quieter side, Dennis plans on a rock waterfall with a fence around it for a peaceful alcove. He intends to install a picnic area with gazebo and hopes the park will be used for safety events and family picnics.

This park serves as a reminder of the sacrifice made by David and his family and all law enforcement and their families who have lost officers in the line of duty. It also provides a good place for families to go relax, have a picnic, and spend some quality time. I'm pretty certain David would approve.

Dennis would like to thank all the people who helped with this park, although they are too numerous to recount in the time and space we have here. If you wish to help with your time or resources, you may contact him directly. If you wish to donate financially, an account has been set up at First Security Bank, P.O. Box 312, Three Forks, MT 59752. □

