

Memorial to victims gets permanent place in Cleveland

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There is a wall in Cleveland. It stands not as a reminder that factories close and that businesses go under. This wall represents a different kind of loss. This loss is the most needless kind. The kind of loss Regina Shepherd knows about all too well.

On Sep. 7, 2007, Shepherd lost her son, Bandon Marshall, at the time a Genesis High School student, when he was visiting his aunt on the St. Clair side of Cleveland. She said he was followed by a group of young men who later opened fire on him, striking him in the leg. The wound would eventually take the 16-year-old's life.

The wall dedicated to deaths like this one, caused by acts of violence, is called the Memorial Wall/Wall of Sorrows. Parts of it have been traveling around the Cleveland area, while other parts have remained in storage.

According to the Survivors Victims of Tragedy Web site, the Memorial Wall, when fully

constructed, is four feet tall by 30 feet long. Constructed mainly of vinyl and plywood boards, the wall has existed since 1997, and now contains the names of 1,169 people who have been killed in Cuyahoga County.

According to former Black on Black Crime Inc. Secretary current Treasurer Judy Martin, the people whose names are on the board are men, women, some elderly and even a few infants. Martin, whose son's name appears on the wall, also said the majority of people memorialized were either 19 or 20 years old when they died. Martin also said about 42 percent of homicide victims in Cuyahoga County are under 25.

"There are far too many of our children on that wall," Martin said. "Every day I'm adding people to this wall."

According to Shepherd, when her son was gunned down, he was going to be celebrating his 17th birthday in just over a week.

While the majority of people on the wall are young, Martin said that the past year showed

an increase in the number of elderly people being added to the wall, representing people of all ages who have been affected by violence.

The wall is not exclusively for those that have died in Cuyahoga County, either. It has the names and pictures from people from other cities in Ohio, such as Cincinnati, Columbus and Canton, according to Martin.

The BBCI President Earnest Harris said the wall shows the destruction of families throughout Cuyahoga County and the dangerous conditions in which people live. Marshall's death echoes this idea in that, not only is his family affected by his death, but now 15 Cleveland-area teens are in prison or at least going to be put on trial.

Martin sees the wall a bit differently, though. She said the wall's intention is to show the community that it's time to start working and talking with and then listening to the young adults in the community so these deaths can stop. She also believes the wall is meant to

raise consciousness and show what can continue to happen if nothing is done; and that it creates a sense of community while illustrating those whom have been affected by acts of violence.

"It is what it is," Shepherd said in regards to the wall. "It memorializes the loss of life."

The wall is not just a warning to the community, though. According to Alvin Brooks, a member on the Action Committee of BBCI, many treated the original site as hallowed ground. It was always clean, no one sold drugs there and it was posted on the only abandoned building in the area that had not been vandalized.

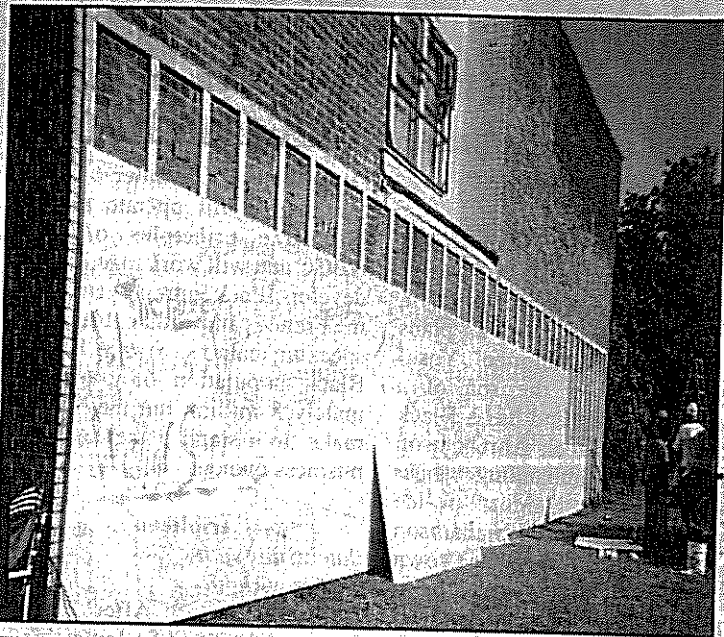
The wall was originally posted on a building at 14770 Euclid Ave., just east of Lee Road. According to Martin, the wall was taken down when the city planned to tear down the building. The wall has been in a portable form since then, being held in storage and Martin's trunk.

"We couldn't save what was in East Cleveland," Martin said, "but we found a place for it."

Before finding the new location for the wall, BBCI was offered a number of places for the wall, but most of them would hide the wall. That's why they refused those offers, according to Martin. She said the wall illustrates a problem that needs to be seen.

The new location will be at 11300 Superior Ave., in Cleveland. Martin said plans for the new spot include a garden and landscaping, with bushes and flowers, and additional spots on the wall for names and pictures of missing persons.

The wall's area for missing persons is being expanded from only having children to include



The Memorial Wall/Wall of Sorrows

adults, as well. When the missing children and teens' faces were posted on the wall and on flyers around communities, a number of them were found or they simply returned, Brooks said. The hope is that the trend continues when the wall is erected in its new location.

Plans for the site of the wall also include a mural of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Marcus Garvey looking down on the names and faces posted there. There are also plans for a park next to the wall with benches and walkways with secure footing for people to come sit, talk, pay respects and cry together, Martin said.

According to her this is important because after losing someone, the physical, mental and emotional toll can be so great that people can hardly stand or walk. It will also provide a sense of community. Martin said that about 60 per-

cent of the time when people met at the wall to pay respects they found the ones they had lost knew each other.

Saturday and Sunday, May 17 and 18, boards are scheduled to be put up on the new building. Martin stresses that this is a project for and by the community because the issue of violence is one that affects the entire community. But she needs help.

"We need sponsors," Martin said.

So far BBCI, the Greater Cleveland Chapter of Million Moms and Future of Cleveland Under Scrutiny have expressed interest in helping with the project, according to Martin.

She also said those interested in helping should call her at (216) 990-0679. There is also information on the Survivors Victims of Tragedy Web site: Survivors Victims of Tragedy.org.

PICTURE THIS...

FAMILY...WHAT EVERY CHILD NEEDS

Hi!
My name is Jessica and I'm 15 years-old.

Do you want to know a little bit about me?

What are my favorite things? I have lots of favorite things to do, watch on

