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## Celebrating 10 Years of the Crosses

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Initially disheartened by the fact that the crosses were destroyed, Heaton knew he had to continue. "When I started putting the crosses up and they got ripped down so quickly, I realized how powerful a message it was," he said. Heaton enlisted the help of Bob Hanson and they began to build support among the community for a memorial. Three years after the initial crosses were erected and quickly torn down, Heaton and Hanson were joined by the Mount Diablo Peace and Justice Center, Grandparents for Peace, and the Lamorinda Peace and Justice Group. Together, the volunteers put up 300 crosses on Veterans Day in 2006.

Only a few months later in February 2007, the number had expanded to more than 2,000 crosses on the hillside. "Our goal was to have one cross for every American killed in Iraq, and we quickly found out we couldn't do it. There wasn't enough space and we didn't have enough energy or materials to keep up with the number," said Hanson.

Heaton, who has been tracking the death toll of the war, pointed out that "the most conservative number I can give is (around) 7,000 soldiers have fallen since the war started."

Initially the crosses received

a lot of attention as they were a controversial topic amongst the Lamorinda community members. The Crosses of Lafayette were discussed at multiple city council meetings. Many residents were upset at the crosses. They felt they were disrespectful to the troops, that the crosses were not honoring the fallen but were sending a negative message of defeatism.

"Over the years Veterans have become supportive. They realized the Crosses are a protest against forgetting our soldiers," said Heaton. He added that, "Those who came to the memorial realized it was something for them; to help them cope."

Maintaining the hillside is no easy task. "Every year, we have to weed whack for fire prevention," said Hanson. Heaton, Hanson and other volunteers often head up to the hillside to touch up paint on the crosses. At times there would be 50 volunteers out keeping up the crosses. Heaton added that they are in the process of "re-digging all of the crosses and straightening them out. I'm trying to go through over the next year or two to completely clean it up." Heaton said that he aims to put them in straight rows so that not only are they better organized on the hillside, but it makes weeding and maintenance so much

easier to do with clearly defined rows in between.

Louise and Johnson Clark have since passed, but now their sons Charles and Steve are trustees of the property. According to Heaton, "We are currently having workshops to come up with design ideas for a permanent memorial. We feel that we've made a lot of progress on it, but it's still in the planning stages. We want to solidify our design idea and present it to Charles and Steve."


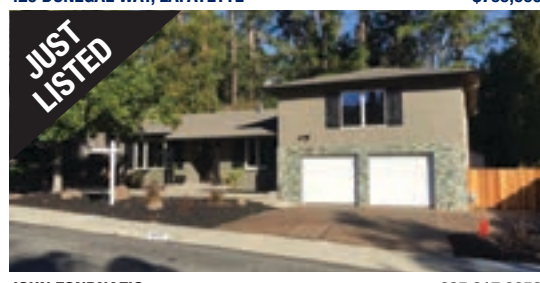
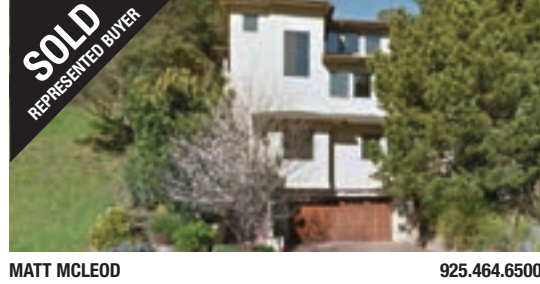
Since Veterans Day 2006, there has been a demonstration every year at the Crosses of Lafayette. There are also demonstrations every Memorial Day. In fact, San Francisco based singer-songwriter Laura Zucker wrote her song "Memorial Day" about the process and the hillside that is now the Crosses of Lafayette. Besides attracting national media attention, the Crosses of Lafayette have also been recognized internationally. Documentaries have been made in France and Japan (as well as here in the U.S.) about the memorial. A German newspaper even covered the story.

For those interested in making a contribution to support painting, repairs, and weed abatement, they can do so online through the Mount Diablo Peace and Justice Center at www.ourpeacecenter.org.

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