

Grant goes to First Responders Park, Firefighter Memorial

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Ten years since its inception, the Westerville Firefighter's Memorial received a quarter of the project's funding in one helping last week.

On Thursday, Feb. 5 the Ohio Cultural Facilities Commission announced the approval of \$125,000 grant to the memorial and Westerville's planned First Responders Park, for which the memorial will serve as the centerpiece.

"It's a relief to know we would be receiving the money," said Founder Tom Ullom who added that he learned of the news on the 11th anniversary of the death of Westerville firefighter David Theisen, the inspiration for the \$500,000 memorial.

"It makes me think that Dave is still with us."

Approval for the funding is first approved by state legislature and can only be used for "brick and mortar" projects. Since 1988 the state agency has disbursed more than \$400 million in capital funds to "enhance the state's cultural facilities."

Also receiving \$750,000 in funding during this approval cycle was Worthington's McConnell Arts Center.

The goal for the First Responders Park and Firefighter's Memorial, which will include a landscaped plaza with walkways, seating, and a sculpture in the likeness of Theisen, is to be completed for the 150th anniversary of the Franklin Fire Guards.

On Dec. 15 the last of an existing parking lot east of Fire Station 111, 400 W. Main St., was removed to make way for the new park. This spring the conduit will be installed and the organization may be able to pick up steel from the World Trade Center wreckage, already approved by the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey.

Ullom said so far a total of \$208,000 has been raised and he believes the plaza will be completed on time. The statue in Theisen's likeness though, is unlikely as all of the funds raised so far will go towards the site. The statute needed a \$30,000 deposit by January for the work to be completed on time.

"Unless someone comes up with a large chunk of change in the near future I don't see that happening," Ullom said.

To compliment the Ohio Cultural Facilities Commission's funding, Ullom said one upcoming fundraiser will be a bicycle ride. The date of May 23 is set, but the event is still being organized and looking for sponsors.

Donations, which are tax deductible, are also being accepted on the memorial's Web site at wffmemorial.org.

"A lot of time that half million dollars scares people, but once you start adding things up we're actually coming in under budget," Ullom said.