

# First Responders' Park

\$125,000 approved to fund memorial

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The funds collected to erect a permanent homage to Westerville's first responders were more than doubled earlier this month.

On Feb. 5, Westerville was awarded \$125,000 by the Ohio Cultural Facilities Commission (OCFC) toward completion of the city's Firefighters' Memorial & First Responders' Park.

Westerville Division of Fire medic Tom Ullom said the funds will go a long way toward completing the memorial.

"Including in-kind donations we have roughly \$208,000 overall now, including these funds," Ullom said. "We're still a long way off, but we hope to get the infrastructure put in in the spring, when the weather breaks."

He said the city still needs about \$130,000 to complete the project.

Grading work began on the site of the park, 374 W. Main St., in September. When completed, First Responders' Park will take up 12,033 square feet, and will include a bronze statue called "The Crossing," a memorial wall, brick walkways and a World Trade Center memorial, complete with steel recovered from Ground Zero in New York City.

The memorial will serve as a tribute to fallen firefighter Dave Theisen, and will provide all firefighters and the public with an inspirational and healing setting in which to celebrate the achievements and contemplate the losses experienced by the city's first-responders, Ullom said.

According to OCFC spokeswoman Jessica Fagan, the commission's approval of the funds allows Westerville to be reimbursed on a pro rata basis with funds appropriated in House Bill 562 of the 127th General Assembly.

The OCFC works to improve the state's cultural facilities by disbursing capital funds appropriated by the legislature for improvement projects at nonprofit theaters, museums, historical sites and publicly-owned professional sports venues.

Ullom said the city is waiting for documentation from the New York City Port Authority to acquire the steel from Ground Zero.

"Basically the money we've received so far is going to construct the park, and we're hoping to look at some other resources for (other aspects of the project)," Ullom said.

"The challenge is that it's hard times for everyone right now, but every little bit helps."

Ullom said the goal is to have the park completed by October 2010, when the Westerville Division of Fire will celebrate its 150th anniversary with Fire Prevention Week.

Battalion Chief John Bokros said the division will host several events throughout next year in honor of the anniversary, including a gala at Villa Milano on Feb. 27, 2010.

Plans for the park can be viewed on the Web at [www.wffmemorial.org](http://www.wffmemorial.org).

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