

The History of Freedom Grove

Establishing Freedom Grove

After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Rotary Club of Urbana, Ohio approached the Board of Champaign County, Ohio Commissioners about leasing and improving a vacant six acre plot of land located adjacent to the Champaign County Government offices. The Rotary Club wanted to provide a location for citizens of the Champaign County community to give tribute and reflection for the freedoms this great nation has to offer, by honoring America's fallen military heroes and promoting patriotism in Champaign County.

On September 11, 2002, the Board of County Commissioners enthusiastically adopted the Rotary Club's vision and passed a resolution establishing Champaign County's "Freedom Grove", a place where people could gather and reflect on the sacrifices that others gave to maintain our freedoms.

Nestled between State Route 55 and U.S. Route 68 on the south side of Urbana, Freedom Grove is located in the county seat of Champaign County, Ohio. Although the improvements on the land are being made by the Urbana Rotary Club, the tract of land on which Freedom Grove is situated is owned by the County of Champaign.

The Rotary Club takes pride that the Freedom Grove Project is promoted as a "countywide collaboration coordinated by the Urbana Rotary Club." The Rotary Club has been fortunate to receive many in-kind donations from local and national businesses, utility companies and the City of Urbana to facilitate the development of Freedom Grove. The Rotary Club projects that Freedom Grove improvements will take approximately 25 years before the land and fixtures to the property are fully developed.

An ongoing fundraising campaign has been established to raise the funds necessary to complete the project. A website designed to promote and raise funds for the park can be accessed at www.freedomgrove.com.

Phase I

The initial construction of Freedom Grove began in 2004, as the Rotary Club raised funds sufficient to cover the following improvements:

1. Erected a brick bell tower to house Champaign County's Bicentennial Bell. The Bicentennial Bell was cast in August 2003 to honor the State of Ohio's 200th anniversary of its establishment as a state. Each of Ohio's 88 counties received a bell to commemorate the occasion;
2. Placement of ten (10) monuments, spanning in time from the Revolutionary War to our current War on Terror, dedicated to those who served our country and preserved our freedoms;
3. Development of the Walk of Honor, a brick plaza located at the entrance to the grove and surrounding the bell tower. Individuals, families and businesses have purchased engraved bricks to honor and remember individuals for their military service;
4. Planted over 85 trees and established a gravel one and one-half mile walkway through the six-acre park.

Phase II

Inspired by a May 2010 news account of another Central Ohio community receiving a 9/11 World Trade Center steel artifact for memorial display, Champaign County Prosecutor and Urbana Rotarian Nick Selvaggio initiated the application process with the Port Authority of New York / New Jersey to acquire a 9/11 World Trade Center steel artifact for permanent display at Champaign County's Freedom Grove. Selvaggio prepared and submitted the June 2010 application on behalf of the Board of Champaign County Commissioners, with the support of the Urbana Rotary Club.



Receiving a memorial artifact from the World Trade Center would hold particular significance for the Champaign County community, as one of its native daughters perished at the site. United Airlines Flight Attendant Alicia Nicole Titus, 28, was killed when United Flight 175 became the second airliner to crash into the World Trade Center.

In December 2010, the Port Authority authorized transfer of World Trade Center Archive Inventory No. A-0033 to the Board of Champaign County Commissioners. Specifically, Freedom Grove was honored with receiving a steel beam measuring 144"L x 28"W x 18"H and weighing 1,470 lbs. Selvaggio was charged with executing the transfer agreement and coordinating the physical acquisition of the artifact.

On April 7, 2011, Fred & Cathie Maine traveled to Kennedy Airport, New York City and generously donated their time and equipment to meet with Port Authority officials and transport the 9/11 artifact back to Champaign County. Accompanying the Maines to New York City was Nick Selvaggio, representing the Board of Commissioners and Don Bauer, Terry Howell and Terry Rittenhouse representing the Urbana Rotary Club.

On April 9, 2011, the Urbana Rotary Club and Maine's Towing sponsored a countywide tour of the 9/11 artifact, visiting five Champaign County Fire Stations, with large numbers of motorcycle club escorts, firefighters, police officers and community celebrants turning out at each venue.

Since acquiring possession of the 9/11 artifact, 9/11 Memorial Design Artist Mike Major and Freedom Grove Co-Chairmen Don Bauer and Terry Howell have partnered with many Champaign County businesses who have generously donated in-kind products and services to make construction of this 9/11 Memorial possible.



This 9/11 World Trade Center Artifact, a hallowed piece of twisted steel, acutely depicts the violent and horrific events of September 11, 2001. The Urbana Rotary Club is grateful to the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey for enabling the Champaign County community to turn this American tragedy into a celebration of American freedom.