

Students Remember Classmates

By Christine M. Quirk May 12, 2011 Publication: Times & Courier (Lancaster-Clinton, MA) Page: 9 Word Count: 677

Clinton High's Veteran's Memorial Athletic Field will soon offer a sort of preferred seating: a memorial bench to remember football captain Chris Reusch and cheerleading captain Cassie Poulin.

"If you sit on that bench, you'll be able to see the cheerleaders and behind them is the football field," Class Advisor Tony Gannon said.

The class of 2009 will dedicate the bench at 6 p.m., Friday, May 20.

"I started crying when I heard - it's so nice," Cathy Poulin, Cassie's mother, said. "Here we go again: The small town with a big heart. It means a lot to us that they're doing this. The outpouring from this town is awesome."

Reusch and Poulin both died in car accidents: Reusch on Dec. 14, 2008 and Poulin less than year later on Sept. 21, 2009. Poulin graduated in 2009; Reusch was a member of the class of 2010.

"They were great kids, and it's unfortunate they're always going to be remembered as kids," Gannon said. "They were special to the school, as the cheerleader captain and the football captain. Their legacy will live on with this bench."

"It's been a long time in the making," 2009's class president Paul Zapantis said. "Mr. Gannon came up with the idea last fall."

Gannon, however, refused to take sole credit.

"Derek Moisan and I threw it around," he said. Moisan was also an advisors to the class of 2009. "We had money left in the Class of 2009 account and we had an idea of what we wanted to do."

The bench originally stood in Central Park, the site of Clinton High's graduation and many annual prom pictures. When the park was redone about ten years ago, the benches went into storage, and last year Parks and Rec Director Daria Janda asked Gannon if he knew of any place that could use them.

"They were solid, but they needed work," Gannon said.

So one of the benches was refurbished by Toby Crowley's woodshop class.

"It became a collaborative effort," Gannon said. "It's a real big bench, with a divider in the middle. The shop class tightened it, replaced the broken slats and painted it a green color. Then we went to Zoll's [Regonini-Zoll Memorials] and he gave us the best deal you could have gotten on two bronze plates. He gave us all the hardware and showed us how to put them on."

The bronze plates will list the students' dates of birth and death and their Clinton High athletic affiliations. The bench will be flanked by two bushes with a shade tree behind, Zapantis said, all donated by DiMeco's Nursery and Landscape.

"It's going to be really nice," Zapantis said. "We figure people are always running the track and there's no place to sit except for the bleachers."

"It fell into place so smoothly," Gannon added. "There wasn't a lot for any of us to do, but I think when it's done it's going to look like a million dollars."

There is perhaps no place in town more appropriate than the athletic field.

"Cassie spent so much time up at the field," Poulin said. "We think of her every day, but to know everyone else is, it's so awesome. You can't even explain the feeling."

The field also served as a source of comfort to the young people's classmates when news of the accidents spread.

"When they died, that's where everyone met up," Zapantis said.

Reba Reusch, Chris' mother, said her family was "happy and excited" about the bench.

"The people in this town have been amazing," Reusch said. "They've been so supportive, thank God, I'm glad I was here [when this happened.] We're thrilled. It's such an honor."

Gannon hoped the bench would serve as a both a tribute and a fond memory to Poulin and Reusch.

"You always tell the kids these are the best times of your life," Gannon said. "You go on, and you do whatever you want to do, but when you reflect, you will remember it all started in high school and your closest friends are from there. I think that's what Chris and Cassie's friends will do, as they move all, I think they'll always remember them."

Times & Courier (Lancaster-Clinton, MA)

Date: May 12, 2011

Page: 9

Copyright, 2011, CP Media Inc. d.b.a. Community Newspaper Company. No content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission.