

## OAKLAND

## Pontiac memorial a comfort

*Families visit site honoring fallen police, firefighters*

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The Michigan Fallen Heroes Memorial rests in a muddy field off Telegraph Road in Pontiac, next to a building that will become new administrative offices of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office in May.

Several families of the officers and firefighters whose names are on the wall have already visited the memorial, which was dedicated nearly seven weeks ago. The visitors included a widow who relived memories of her husband; a mother and father who remembered their son, and a daughter and granddaughters who paid homage to a father and grandfather they hardly knew.

"A number of people on that wall are people I've known and known well," Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said Monday.

Bouchard said he came up with the idea for the memorial about 10 years ago; he wanted to create something to recognize the sacrifices of Michigan's law enforcement officers. Three of his police academy classmates are on the wall, he said. After Sept. 11, 2001, he said, he began a serious effort to build it. He said he raised about \$300,000 in private donations to have it built.

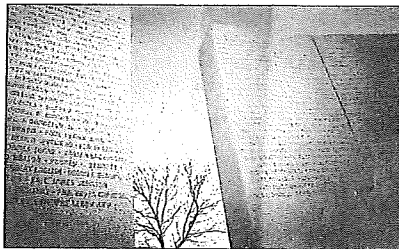
Bouchard said the next step is to raise money to landscape the field the memorial sits on and to create a searchable computer database that includes the stories behind each name.

Families of the fallen say the memorial is a place they can go



Photos by HEATHER ROUSSEAU/Special to the Free Press

These life-size bronze statues of a police officer and firefighter are part of the new Michigan Fallen Heroes Memorial located in the Oakland County Complex in Pontiac. It was funded by private and corporate donations.



Standing 7½-feet tall, the wall bears the names of 761 Michigan police officers and firefighters who have died on the job.

to remember and honor their loved ones.

Frances Nelson, 61, of Sterling Heights called the memorial a great tribute. Her husband, James Nelson, was a Sterling Heights firefighter who died from a fall while responding to an arson in 1983. The memorial, Nelson said, was long overdue.

Life-size bronze statues of a

police officer and firefighter solemnly face a 7½-foot tall wall, which bears the names of 761 Michigan police officers and firefighters who died on the job since 1864. In 2005 alone, eight police and firefighters died. Seven of those names are on the wall, said Oakland County sheriff's spokeswoman Amanda Ford.

The eighth, Dearborn Police Cmdr. Dale Bernock, will be added in the spring, Ford said.

Bernock died of a heart attack in October, after the other names were already etched, Ford said.

Livonia residents Duane and Irene Olander, who are in their 70s, said the memorial honored their son, Steven Olander, a Detroit firefighter who died in a blaze four years ago.

They said the fire was on the fourth floor and he was on the ground holding a ladder when someone jumped out of the building and landed on him. He died from the injuries.

Duane Olander, who also was a Detroit firefighter, said he appreciated the acknowledgement.

### About the tribute

**Location:** Near Telegraph Road and County Center Drive in Pontiac. It is the only memorial in the state honoring all police and firefighters who have died in the line of duty since 1864.

**Number of names:** 761, including: 545 police officers and 216 firefighters

**Number who died in 2005:** 8

**Cost:** About \$300,000

**Granite wall:** 7½ feet tall and 33 feet wide

**For more information:** Call 248-585-5103 or e-mail michiganfallenheroes@yahoo.com. To contribute to the memorial, checks can be sent to the Michigan Fallen Heroes Memorial, 1201 N. Telegraph Road, Pontiac, 48341.

Source: Oakland County Sheriff's Office

"It's showing a little bit of — you know — that he was a hero and will be remembered," he said.

And June Trombley, 82, of St. Clair Shores said she couldn't put her feelings into words when she saw the memorial.

Inscribed on it is the name of her father, Clarence LaCroix, a Macomb County sheriff's motorcycle deputy who died in 1925 while pursuing robbery suspects, Trombley said. Her daughters, Mary Trombley, 63, of Clinton Township and Pat Meffer, 62, of New Baltimore, accompanied her to the memorial recently.

June Trombley said she was just a toddler when her dad died. The memorial, she said, helped her feel closer to him.