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ROUND ROCK

Baylor's 'Immortal Ten' to be honored with bridge memorial

Train crash with basketball team's bus killed 10 in 1927, led to safety improvements.

By Nicole Barrios nicole.barrios@acnnewspapers.com

Round Rock is constructing a memorial to commemorate a part of city history that led to railroad safety improvements in the state and across the nation.

In January 1927, the Baylor University men's basketball team was traveling by bus from Waco to Austin to play a game against the University of Texas. It was a rainy afternoon, according to historical accounts, and the highway came through the city along Main Street and then turned south on Mays Street.

Where the highway met the railroad tracks there was no overpass, no automated arms and no lights, according to information from the Williamson County Historical Commission.

The bus turned toward the railroad tracks and was struck by a train going east. The collision instantly killed six of the students. Four more died later that day. The 10 students who died have since been known as the Immortal Ten.

A memorial to honor the Immortal Ten is being built as part of Round Rock's downtown renovation project.

Mayor Alan McGraw spearheaded the project and began talks with the Baylor president on creating a memorial in the city, said downtown manager Courtney Ainsworth. McGraw said it's important to remember such a "huge, historical incident that happened in Round Rock."



“Right now there’s a little pitiful sign next to the bridge and 10 people were killed there, and it was a historical event not only for the city but really for the nation,” he said.

Ainsworth said a memorial came to the forefront of conversations on the downtown master plan. She said it was important for the city to incorporate that part of the city’s history into the bigger downtown construction project.

Lampposts installed on the bridge are painted in the Baylor green school color. A green and gold stripe has been painted on either side of the bridge near the curb, Ainsworth said.

When the memorial is complete, there will be a large arch over the bridge with a plaque at the base detailing the significance of the crash, said city spokesman Will Hampton.

The 1927 crash was one of the first events that began the effort to build bridges over railroad tracks for safety, McGraw said.

After the event, state legislation was introduced to construct overpasses or underpasses at all places where state highways intersected with railroads, according to the historical commission.

When U.S. 81 was built through Round Rock eight years later, the Texas Highway Department built the first railroad overpass in Texas and dedicated a plaque to the Immortal Ten, according to the commission. School buses across the nation later introduced new safety features and began stopping at all railroad crossings.

McGraw said the city has never done anything to recognize the Immortal Ten. People don’t notice the small sign near the bridge commemorating the incident, and many longtime residents don’t know it happened, he said.

Several years ago, the city and Union Pacific were in a lawsuit for an unrelated matter and, as part of the settlement, the railroad authority agreed to contribute \$100,000 toward the memorial, McGraw said.

Since the project will be done around the beginning of 2017, McGraw said, the city is looking into holding the dedication ceremony in January, near the 90th anniversary of the event.

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