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Morris Richardson II / The Detroit News

Grieving students walk the memorial path which circles a silver bell tree planted for 11-year-old Joslynn Saelens.

School builds memorial for former pupil

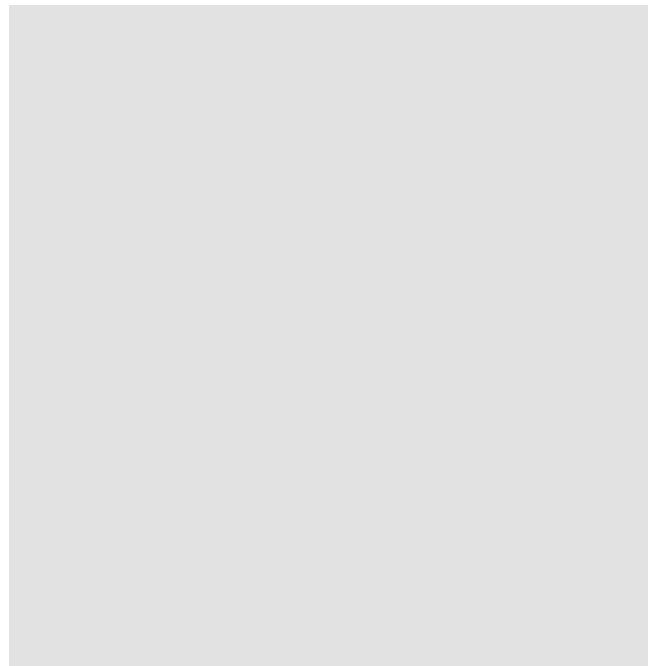
Redford girl killed by car honored at site

By Delores Patterson / *The Detroit News*

CANTON TOWNSHIP -- What started as a typical landscaping job for Don Else turned into much more when sixth-grade student Joslynn Saelens was killed by a car crossing Beech Daly.

Instead of installing more plants in Hilbert Middle School's courtyard, which has become a natural habitat, Canton-based Clink Landscaping developed a memorial in honor of the Redford student.

"I had a niece who died at only 30 days old and a 16-year-old cousin, so I know what it is to lose someone. I could relate to what everyone was going through," Else said. "When the principal told me about the tragedy, it brought out so much emotion in me



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and I think that can be seen in the work.

"People need a place where they can seek comfort and peace and I hope that's what this becomes."

Else and his crew constructed a memorial walkway that circles counter-clockwise around a Carolina silver bell tree planted for 11-year-old Joslynn. The design represents remembrance, or going back in time, Else said. Inside the circular walkway is a nine-foot, 40-year-old, hand-cast football with the school's mascot in a bed of lava rock.

The landscaping company, school officials and students dedicated two stainless steel plaques, with poems from Joslynn's classmates engraved last Friday.

"She touched a lot of people's lives," said Chris Saelens, Joslynn's father. "I'm very happy and honored that the school has done this for her."

Best friend Shaheda Greeley, 11, said, "I think the walkway is outstanding and very sweet. I miss Joslynn very much and think this will help people remember what a good person she was to us."

Eighth-grader Rachel Perrel agreed.

"Even though she was taken from us so unexpectedly, we'll always have a part of her nearby," Rachel said of Joslynn, who died in late October.

The memorial walkway is the latest edition to the courtyard, which started being developed two years ago with the help of seventh-grade science teachers Dan Behen and Jean Eberts.

The teachers envisioned an ecology lab and about 300-400 middle school students have been involved in the project.

Over the years, students planted wildflowers and rose gardens, as well as bushes and a pond with a waterfall that the students dug themselves. Students have explored ecosystems and examined pond water under microscopes in search of single-cell organisms.

In the early stages of the 9,500-square-foot courtyard, the school lost their beloved 15-year custodian, Diana Niemi, to cancer and decided to



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Shaheda Greeley, left, consoles Shalynn Chorkey at the Hilbert Middle School memorial.

Memorial poems

Hilbert Middle School sixth-graders had these poems engraved in stainless steel in honor of classmate Joslynn Saelens, killed in October:

We haven't lost you
We've only gained an Angel
Forever you will remain
in our hearts

To our friend Joslynn Saelens
Though we're far apart
We're still close together
We've tied a knot no one can sever
We'll be friends forever and ever.

(updated
08/09/2001).

dedicate the entire project to her.

Students and staff plan to place a boulder with Niemi's name engraved in the stone in the courtyard at a later date.

"It's now a place where people can come and enjoy not only the beauty before them, but remember two people that were very dear to many," Behen said.

Eberts said "the kids really needed a place to go and reflect. The days after Joslynn died, the students were out in the yard, constructing a makeshift memorial with cards and flowers. Now, they have something that's permanent, and hopefully this will help them in their grieving process."

Principal Christine Lee said the school has additional plans for extra walkways, benches, and plants. "There is still much to be done," Lee said.

The courtyard project has been funded with the help of parents clubs, T-shirt and candy fund-raisers, teacher donations and donations from the community and businesses.

Overall, the school has spent about \$7,000, and the two-day work job by Clink Landscaping a week after Thanksgiving was done at a discount.

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A stainless steel plaque was mounted on a tree.

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