

## Where he felt at home: Memorial honors Laychak, others killed on Sept. 11, 2001

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SIERRA VISTA -- Only a year after Dave Laychak left Sierra Vista to work in Washington, D.C., his life was lost when terrorists crashed a commercial airliner into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

On Wednesday, his spirit returned to Sierra Vista, a place he called home for nine years and a community that he loved, said his widow, Laurie.



As she spoke at a memorial dedication for her husband at Tompkins Park, Laurie wiped away tears.

She and Dave were military dependents and moved around the world, "but this is the place we truly felt at home," she said.

During his time in Sierra Vista, Dave was involved in coaching children's sports and playing in adult leagues. The couple also was part of the ministry of the Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church.

She told the nearly 100 people who attended the dedication that Dave seemed to be stressed two weeks before Sept. 11, 2001.

"He said he missed the sunrises on his way to work, the mountains, his friends," Laurie said. "He felt like his soul was in Arizona. Now I

know he was right. His soul is now back here."

As tears flowed down her cheeks, the moisture of remembrance went down the faces of some in the crowd.

Their two children, Jennifer, 9, and Zackery, 11, came to Tompkins Park when they lived in Sierra Vista.

Pointing to the paved path around the park, Laurie said. "It was here that Dave taught

Zackery to ride his bike."

After his death, Laurie said she struggled where to bury her husband's remains. She decided that he would be put to rest in Virginia because of family ties, instead of returning him to Sierra Vista.

Having a memorial dedicated to Dave in Sierra Vista "has help me come to peace with that struggle," she said.

The memorial to Dave Laychak consists of a flagpole, two benches and a memorial block in the shape of a pentagon, paid for by private donations and a picnic ramada near it put up by the city.

Bruce Dockter, who heads the Network Enterprise Technology Command's resource management office, said "we lost a friend" when the attack happened nearly two years ago.

Dave worked for Dockter.

Three days after the terrorist attack there was a candle light ceremony in Veterans' Memorial Park to honor Dave and all the others who died on that September day.

As part of Wednesday's ceremony, a small detail of soldiers from the command's headquarters company of the 9th U.S. Army Signal Command raised three flags -- the American, Arizona and the 9-11 Remembrance banners.

Dockter noted that the 9-11 special flag will be raised and flown every September.

On two sides of the memorial are words dedicating the area to Dave and the others killed on Sept. 11, 2001, along with the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi asking God to the Catholic saint an instrument of peace.

There also is a poem that states: "If tears could build a stairway, and memories a lane, I'd walk right up to heaven and bring you home again."

The Laychak family members weren't the only ones remembering a lost loved one on Sept. 11, 2001. Patricia Scales, whose husband, also named Dave, died in the attack on the Pentagon, attended Wednesday's ceremony.

She and her 14-year-old son, Ashton, moved to Sierra Vista before the attack because of her son's asthma.

"David was eight months from retirement," Patricia said. "He didn't even know he was selected for promotion to colonel."

The official notification of his promotion was to be made three days after the attack. The Army personnel officer was posthumously promoted.

The day of the attack, Patricia said she received an e-mail from her husband and responded.

"It was just the usual chit-chat," she said. "It turned out to be an ordinary e-mail on an extraordinary day."

As with the Laychak family who traveled to attend a memorial dedication, she and her son went back to Virginia in December to attend the dedication of the Col. David Scales Memorial Reserve Center at Fort Belvoir.

Sierra Vista Mavor Tom Hessler said during the ceremony that he wondered "how the

people who perished (on Set. 11, 2001) would grade us today."

As the United States has taken on the world of terrorism, the grades should be high, he said.

"If we did nothing, they would be disappointed in us," the mayor said.

As for the memorial to Dave Laychak, he said the Sierra Vista community has earned an A plus for remembering a friend and colleague.