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Holocaust memorial takes shape Friday with granite stones being placed

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NASHUA – A Holocaust memorial at Rotary Common on Main Street began to take shape Friday afternoon.

The project, organized by former Alderman Fred Teeboom, started fundraising in 2009 and laid down the foundation for the memorial at the end of 2011.

The memorial is a set of six granite stones, each weighing up to five tons, set in a circle upon a round, flat foundation. Each stone has the name of an extermination camp inscribed on it. There are bent brackets spouting from each stone at the top, and the stones also have etched barbed wire on them.

Teeboom, who grew up in Amsterdam during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, said the city was unanimous in voting to erect the park and monument in honor of Holocaust victims.

"It was the greatest evil in the history of mankind," Teeboom said.

Teeboom approached John Weidman, an artist, with the idea after he saw his sculptures in the rotary by Rivier University.

"He was very receptive of this," Teeboom said. "It came together very quickly."

The walls of the memorial were set in place Friday. However, the centerpiece to the monument won't be in place until later this month, Teeboom said.

"There's the name of each camp on the blocks, and the bent brackets are a symbol of railroad tracks for the trains," Teeboom said. "There's also the barbed wire on the stone."

He said the barbed wire is representative of the fences at the extermination camps. Sobibor, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Chelmno, Belzec, and Majdanek, the names of the extermination camps, are written on the stones.

The centerpiece to the monument is a stack of donated bricks with a black cube at the top. The cube is so shiny that you can see your reflection in it, Teeboom said.

"It symbolizes the crematory and ashes," he said. "To me, that represents ashes, but you also see your reflection in it, and that says, 'In a different time and different place, you could have been at the extermination camp in the gas chambers.'"

Teeboom noted that at these six extermination camps, 3 million people were killed.

"The walls to the memorial are open," Teeboom said. "And the reason is so you can see that even if you can imprison people and torture people, you cannot imprison their spirits, and that's what the walls represent."

He said he wanted people to gain that experience by walking through the monument. There also will be a plaque by the memorial explaining the story behind it.

Weidman, who collaborated with Teeboom on the design, was more than willing to include the elements they wanted to represent in the memorial.

"It's more about history and understanding and learning," Weidman said. "We wanted the elements to be metaphors and symbols."

The entire project relies heavily on donations, and people are encouraged to donate bricks that will be used and laid on the pathway. The memorial won't be finished until 2013, as there are still more pieces to add.

Teeboom said the landscaping for it will take place next year as they add a brick pathway to and around the memorial, as well as some benches. When it is finished next year, both Teeboom and Weidman will give a dedication to the memorial and a brief speech about it.

"It's something we take for granted," Weidman said. "We can try to prevent things around us that aren't right. It's one of the aspects of being alive."

They plan to name the memorial the New Hampshire Holocaust Memorial because it is the first in the state.

Information for donations can be found on the memorial website, www.holocaust-memorial-in-nashua.org.

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