

SKYWALK MEMORIAL FOUNDATION, INC.

To the Kansas City Star Editor:

This year marks the 26th anniversary of the collapse of the walkway at the Hyatt Regency Hotel during a tea dance in Kansas City on July 17, 1981. On that evening, 114 people were killed, 216 were injured, and countless lives were forever changed. It remains the deadliest structural collapse in U.S. history other than the terrorist acts in New York City and Oklahoma City, each of which have their own memorials. Yet, Kansas City does not have a memorial to this unprecedented disaster. I therefore announce the formation of the Skywalk Memorial Foundation, Inc. to create this long overdue memorial.

The Skywalk Memorial Foundation is a non-profit corporation consisting of a board of directors and numerous others who have volunteered their time and resources to this worthy and much needed cause. The current five board members were all personally affected by the skywalk tragedy. Brent Wright and I lost our mothers; Frank Freeman was injured and lost his significant other; David Chavez lost his aunt, a member of the all female mariachi band there to perform; and Vincent Ortega was the first police officer who responded that fateful evening.

Our goal is singular and simple: to plan, design and build a one-of-a kind memorial that will remember the victims and honor the emergency workers, including firefighters, medical, police, public servants and others, who responded to the disaster. We intend to do so in a professional and caring manner that permanently respects and memorializes all affected by this tragic event.

The Skywalk Memorial Foundation is now in its initial planning stage. No decisions have been made regarding the actual design or location of an appropriate memorial. To assist in these important decisions, the Skywalk Memorial Foundation has hired Bowman Bowman Novick, a well-known Kansas City area architectural firm, with experience in designing some of Kansas City's best known landmarks. They include the Loose Park Fountain, KC Zoo Gardens Entrance, Fairway City Park and the landscape architecture for the Stowers Institute. In addition, the respected law firm of Shughart Thomson & Kilroy, P.C. is serving as the Foundation's legal counsel.

Building a memorial will require both public and governmental support. The Skywalk Memorial Foundation seeks to reach out to all those affected by this tragedy for their support and involvement in what will be a truly far-reaching endeavor. We believe the time has come for all of those involved to come together to construct an appropriate and respectful memorial recognizing this tragic event and, in doing so, acknowledging the good and compassionate spirit of this tremendous city.

Building a memorial will also require significant fundraising. The Skywalk Memorial Foundation has partnered with the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation (GKCCF), which will administer all funds received. Recognized locally and nationally, the amount of philanthropic funds distributed by GKCCF rank it among the largest of such institutions in the nation. GKCCF has helped more than 2500 non-profits in the Kansas City area and manages more than one billion dollars in assets. Contributions to the Skywalk Memorial Foundation will be managed by the GKCCF and will qualify for charitable tax deductible status to the extent permitted by IRS regulations.

For information on how to get involved or to contact us, or to share your thoughts on this important project, please go to the Skywalk Memorial Foundation's website at www.skywalkmemorial.org. You may also e-mail us at info@skywalkmemorial.org or leave a voice message at 877-KC-SKYWALK (877-527-5992).

The skywalk disaster is a loss that was felt and shared by all of greater Kansas City, and beyond. Now is the time for Kansas City to build a lasting memorial to honor the victims killed and injured and others who so bravely responded on that tragic evening, now 26 years ago.

THE SKYWALK MEMORIAL FOUNDATION, INC.

BY: John E. Sullivan, Director, and for and on behalf of
fellow Directors David Chavez, Frank Freeman,
Vincent Ortega and Brent Wright