

Tiny Montrose plot a shrine for hate crime victims

By Natalie Harms | October 2, 2012

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As Doug

Photo By Michael Paulsen

2 of 3

Alan Everett (left) and Douglas Anderson stand in front of the newly planted Montrose Remembrance Garden at the intersection of California and Grant Streets, Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2011, in Houston. The garden is for the murdered victims in the area, who were targeted due to their sexual orientation. Anderson, a friend of one of the victims, created the Aaron Scheerhoorn foundation to help people who are victims of hate crimes in the area. In Dec. 2010, Scheerhoorn was stabbed to death outside of a club in Montrose. Anderson, along with other members of the foundation came up with the idea to have a garden in remembrance of their friend Aaron. The idea would later lead to other victims being remembered as well. Anderson is the founder and president of the Aaron Scheerhoorn foundation. (Michael Paulsen / Houston Chronicle)



Anderson stood in the Montrose Remembrance Garden he established last year at the corner of California and Grant, he couldn't keep the flood of memories - and emotions - away.

Anderson remembers his friend, **Aaron Sheerhoorn**, who was stabbed and died a few blocks from the garden in December 2010. He wonders how painful Sheerhoorn's last moments were as he ran bleeding to seek shelter at a local bar after being stabbed, but was turned away and later died.

Today, Anderson can visit the garden he created and share the memories of his friend with others.

"The whole idea of a garden is pretty much right up his alley," Anderson said. "He felt a closeness - a connection - to Mother Earth."

After Seerhoorn's death, Anderson just intended to plant a tree for his friend when the garden blossomed, offering a place for all to remember all victims of hate crimes and bullying.

"Personally I was just trying to find a way to cope with the anger and the pain of his loss," Anderson said. "As well as my anger towards his killer and people that stood around Blur's parking lot and watched all this occur."

Later this month, Anderson will be following the trial of the man accused of killing his friend. The trial of **Lydell Grant**, charged with murder in the case, is expected to start Oct. 12.

Opened in late July 2011, the garden has hosted memorials for many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered victims in the area.

"But anybody who wants to come over here and light candles or have a balloon release can do it," said **Alan Everett**, the other of the garden's benefactors. "There is nothing stopping them."

In fact, people visit the garden more than Anderson and Everett know.

"Every once in a while we'll see candles on the stones or people will leave flowers," Anderson said. "I'll come by on a Sunday morning and there will be flowers there and they've came by the night before. It just gives you a good feeling."

The corner belongs to Montrose bar owner, **Charles Armstrong**, who has let it be used as the garden indefinitely.

"We don't have a lot of park space in Houston in the inner city like some cities have," Armstrong said. "Especially in this poor Montrose area. I own a few blocks and as long as I own this area it will be dedicated to all hate crime victims."

Although it has been established for nearly a year and a half, the garden is still unmarked. According to Everett, that's going to change as a donated marker is in the works.

"It'll be good once we get a marker because people don't really know what it is," Everett said.

The garden is just one of a few things Anderson established in memory of his friend. He started an organization called the **Aaron Scheerhoorn Foundation for Change**, which operates a neighborhood watch program.

"On June 28, 2011, I filed the papers for the foundation to be formed," said Anderson. "Another way to remember Aaron was to find away to give back to the community. So we decided to form Aaron's Angels which is a citizens on patrol group."

A few patrollers were trained by **Houston Police Department**, but the group is mainly neighbors watching out for each

other.

In addition, the foundation sent out contracts to local businesses as a part of its Safe Shelter Program to prevent what happened to Scheerhoorn.

"It's a contract - nothing really legally binding - in which a business owner or operator will agree to (asking that) if anybody comes to them in need of some help they won't be turned away," Anderson said.

Armstrong, who has signed the contract for all four of his bars in the area, marvels that there is a need for it. He believes allowing someone shelter in time of need is simply humane.

"I've never pretend to be **Mother Teresa**, God bless her, but I try to do the right thing," he said.

Throughout the past two years and with the upcoming trial, Anderson is left to wonder how Scheerhoorn would feel about his memorial and the foundation he's created in his name.

"Everybody tells me he's probably looking down on us and smiling."

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