

Fund to build Hyatt skywalks memorial is well on its way to goal

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Thanks to a big boost in donations, a fund to honor the victims and survivors of the Hyatt skywalks collapse is closing in on its \$800,000 goal.

"We're well beyond the halfway point," said Brent Wright, a member of the Skywalk Memorial Foundation, which hopes to break ground on a memorial park next year. "We got a lot of momentum after this summer's 30th anniversary."

The foundation issued a fundraising update Tuesday at an event feting Rita Blitt, the artist whose sculpture will be the focal point of the memorial at Hospital Hill Park, 22nd Street and Gillham Road.

More money needs to be raised to construct the memorial and to fund an endowment for upkeep, said Wright, whose mother was among the 114 who perished when walkways in Kansas City's Hyatt Regency hotel collapsed on July 17, 1981.

The foundation hopes to raise those funds through grants — a \$150,000 request to the city is pending — as well as private donations in time for a 2012 groundbreaking.

Among those being solicited for donations are law firms and individual lawyers who received a portion of the \$130 million in settlement checks issued after the disaster.

"We're hoping to get donations wherever we can, but right now we're really focusing on the legal community," said Wright, himself an attorney.

Blitt was unable to attend the summer ceremony for the 30th anniversary, which is what led to this week's event at the Carter Art Center at Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley.

Many Kansas Citians are familiar with Blitt's earliest works, which adorned area shopping malls built by her husband and other family members in the 1960s and '70s.

Since then, though, she has gained an international reputation. Her works have been shown or installed in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Blitt sees her work on the skywalks memorial, in part, as a tribute to the fifth-grade art teacher who inspired her — Ruth Ann Angstead, one of those injured at the Hyatt.

The abstract, stainless steel sculpture will be 23 feet tall, sway in the breeze and include a scroll listing the names of the victims. The parks board approved the design and location, but it won't grant the final go-ahead until the fundraising goal is met.

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