New public art memorial honors 3,100 Baltimore County residents lost to COVID-19

Darreonna Davis

A view of the new COVID-19 memorial public art project in Lake Roland. (Isaac Smay/Baltimore County)

Baltimore County recently unveiled its first commissioned public art project: a memorial at Lake Roland to commemorate county residents who died due to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Memorial Public Art Project is a wall inscribed with personalized poems and stories from community members that was designed by artist James Dinh. It also contains a pathway, a prayer millstone, seating and a memorial mound with planting.

“This memorial — created in partnership with community stakeholders and artists — offers a space to find hope for healing, and peace while remembering the beloved neighbors and loved ones taken from us far too soon,” Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski Jr. said in a press release.

The public art project, which is available for viewing at Lake Roland, 1000 Lakeside Dr., from sunrise to sunset, was supported by several county agencies, including the recreation and parks and health and human services departments.

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“During the pandemic, parks in Baltimore County and nationwide became even more essential as an outlet for residents in uncertain and trying times,” said Bob Smith, the county’s recreation and parks director, in a press release. “Our parks often serve as a space the public uses to find peace and comfort and we are hopeful that this dedicated space will in some small way perhaps provide that to our visitors.”

The memorial was unveiled Nov. 26, just days before the fifth anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 being detected in Wuhan, China. The United States would not get its first confirmed case of the infectious disease until Jan. 20, 2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

By March 2020, Baltimore County had confirmed its first case of COVID-19 and, shortly afterward, then-President Donald Trump declared it a national emergency. County officials said in a press release that some 3,100 people in Baltimore County died of COVID.

The project, which was funded by general county funds, cost $433,000, according to Baltimore Recreation and Parks spokesperson Gregory Wallace.

The memorial’s unveiling occurred just ahead of 80 panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, with names of those with ties to Baltimore, being displayed at the First and St. Stephen’s United Church of Christ on York Road. The panels have been in the area since World AIDS Day on Dec. 1 and will be here through Sunday.

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