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Velvet S. McNeil / The Detroit News

John Alexander and his sons, Shane, left, and Clay, view Robert's Rock, a 12,000-pound granite boulder that stands 11 feet tall on a steel spindle and can be rotated with the push of a hand. The memorial at Ford Field in Northville was installed before Labor Day.

Tribute to Robert

Memorial goes up quietly at park

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

NORTHVILLE -- A controversial memorial to a man shot to death by Plymouth Township police has quietly taken its place in what had been an unkempt corner of a city park.

Without fanfare or dedication ceremonies, Robert's Rock was placed in a garden-like setting carved last month from a thicket between Ingersoll Creek and Hutton Street at the northwest corner of Ford Field.

The sculpture and surrounding plantings and pathways were installed before Labor Day.

It was paid for by the family of Robert VanBuren, 36, who had a history of mental illness and was killed by police in 2004 after he barged into a church day care center.

City officials spent a year considering the \$45,000 gift. VanBuren, his parents and siblings had been longtime residents of the city. Although police say they acted properly, VanBuren's family received a \$1 million to \$2 million settlement from the township's insurance.

The 12,000-pound granite boulder stands 11 feet tall on a steel spindle and can be rotated with the push of a hand.

Rebecca and Steve Fielden, who live near the park, said they were unaware of the history behind the sculpture. Benches with dedication plaques will be placed later.

"We asked the people putting it in place what it was about. They told us it was in memory of a man who loved outdoors and landscaping," Rebecca Fielden said.

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Clay Alexander, left, and his brother, Shane, try to spin the monument, which is in memory of a man with a history of mental illness who was killed by police in 2004 after he barged into a church day care center. [See full image](#)

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"Our sons played with it and loved it right away. It's been done in a tasteful way and it is beautiful."

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