

SYMBOLS: EVERYDAY OBJECTS OFFER COMFORT, HOPE AND STRENGTH

Everyday objects can often become symbols of comfort, hope and strength in the darkest of times. This became evident after America experienced its worst act of domestic terrorism, the Oklahoma City bombing. Many felt helpless in their efforts to help with the rescue and recovery efforts, so they left tokens of support affixed to a chain link fence erected to protect the site. Messages, stuffed animals, flags and other spontaneous signs of caring were placed on this makeshift memorial.

The evening of April 19th, Oklahoma First Lady Cathy Keating and a few others from the community were discussing what they could do to help bring comfort to the shaken city; thus, the Statewide Prayer Service was

born. The service was held the following Sunday, April 23, which was also declared a “National Day of Mourning” by President Bill Clinton. Out of respect for all religions, the service was non-denominational and featured Reverend Billy Graham. President and Mrs. Clinton and then Texas Governor and Mrs. George Bush were in attendance alongside Oklahoma Governor and Mrs. Frank Keating and Oklahoma City Mayor Ron Norick.

The prayer service was slated to begin at 3:00 p.m. at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds Arena. By noon, more than 18,000 people from all over the country were in line to pay their respects. Loudspeakers at All-Sports Stadium

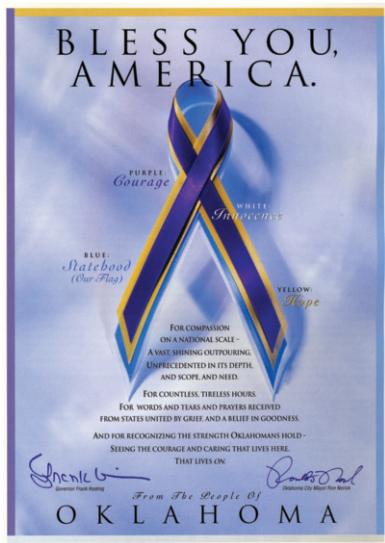


and big-screen televisions at a nearby exhibition building on the Fairgrounds allowed the more than 7,000 individuals that were unable to get into the arena access to the prayer service. The service was also broadcast nationally.

Making the prayer service memorable on such short notice was a community effort. Florists donated flowers to local funeral directors who helped organize the flower arrangements. Fairgrounds and Parks Department crews prepared the Arena. Support also came from the First Lady of Illinois Brenda Edgar, who provided 650 teddy bears.

Edgar was involved in a project that provided teddy bears to children in the custody of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Edgar partnered with Marshall Field and Company to design a simple tan bear, PJ Huggabee Teddy, with the hopes it would offer comfort to a child who was hurting. For every bear sold by Marshall Field's, one was donated to charity.

Edgar felt these bears would bring comfort to the families affected by the bombing. She contacted Oklahoma First Lady Cathy Keating the morning of April 20, and presented her idea. The next day, 250 bears arrived at the Oklahoma Governor's mansion. On Saturday, Keating realized that at least 400 more bears would be needed. With the help of Marshall Field's and Southwest Airlines, the bears arrived the next day in time to be distributed to families at the prayer service. Both young and old clung to the bears, which offered comfort, hope and strength in a time of despair.



Also on display at the Statewide Prayer Service were ribbons worn in support of all those affected by the bombing. Each color symbolized a different meaning.

White – Innocence

Purple – Courage

Yellow – Hope

Blue – Oklahoma

Oklahomans will be forever grateful to those around the world for their support and have tried to show the same kindness to

others affected by terrorism. In response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack, the people of Oklahoma gathered three truckloads of bears to be dispersed at Ground Zero and the Pier 94 Family Assistance Center, as well as schools in New York, Arlington, VA, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Included in that delivery were 600 bears that had been left on the Oklahoma City National Memorial Fence. A tag carrying a message of hope from a community with a shared experience was tied around the neck of each bear.



At the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, held just two weeks after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Oklahomans again showed their solidarity to those affected by terrorism. Runners sported red socks and wore "We Stand Together" stickers as they ran in honor of those who lives were cut short by an act of senseless violence.

On any given day, teddy bears can be seen on the Fence or on one of the Chairs at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and they remain a powerful symbol of comfort, hope and strength.

