



Park Dedication

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The saplings now stand 10 feet tall and the sons and daughters are growing up but the dead fathers will remain forever young.

One of the worst moments in San Diego State University history was memorialized yesterday by families and friends of three college professors murdered seven years ago by a troubled graduate student.

About 200 people gathered on campus to dedicate a park to Chen Liang, 32; D. Preston Lowrey, 44; and Costas S. Lyrintzis, 35.

All three left behind wives and children. All three were popular professors and rising academic stars with promising research – to build better flying machines, to find cheap alternative energy for the Third World.

"Even though the tragedy altered our lives, I feel great comfort my husband is not forgotten," said Deana Alonso-Lyrintzis, gesturing to the framed posters of the men and their work, which will hang in the Engineering Department.

"All of us will grow old, and ugly, and forgotten, but these three professors will stay young and beautiful forever in the memorials," said Alonso-Lyrintzis, whose daughter, Sofia, is now 8.

On Aug. 15, 1996, the three professors sat in the engineering building waiting for 36-year-old Army veteran Frederick Davidson to orally defend his dissertation, the last hurdle toward earning a master's degree.

But Davidson was a man harboring dangerous fantasies that people were out to get him, and he had hidden a gun in the lab's first-aid kit to extract vengeance. He had nearly 60 rounds of ammunition, and he used 23 of them.

The professors never had a chance. The killings made headlines around the world, carried by the media in town for the 1996 Republican National Convention.

San Diego authorities wanted the death penalty for Davidson, but the professors' widows persuaded them to seek a speedier justice. They didn't want a long ordeal.



[UMA SANGHVI / Union-Tribune](#)
[Ying Lowrey \(second from right\), widow of slain professor D. Preston Lowrey, and son Kendall attend a dedication ceremony with family and friends for a park in honor of Lowrey and two other slain engineering professors at SDSU.](#)

Within a year, Davidson was convicted and sentenced to a life term in Corcoran State Prison in the Central Valley, with no possibility of parole.

In one of the many twists to the case, one of the slain professors was not even supposed to be there, but was filling in for a friend. His mother, Sylvia Lowrey, told the crowd at the memorial that he was not really in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"He was a teacher. He was exactly where he was supposed to be, going where a student needed help," said Lowrey, who had flown in from the East Coast for the memorial. "I am a teacher, my daughter is a teacher. My grandson is a teacher. This is the greatest of professions. We hold the golden key . . . to the future."

The memorial park is beside the engineering building fringed with flowering tulip trees and lavender planted last spring. The greenery surrounds a brick plaza with three concrete picnic tables, whose centers hold engraved plaques displaying the names and mathematical equations that summed up each of the professors' research and contributions to their profession.

"This was a long time, too long, in coming," SDSU President Stephen Weber told the crowd. "I don't have to tell you that life is not fair, that the good don't always prevail . . . these were good and decent men working to make our world a better place."

Weber said that for years no one could agree on how to best commemorate them, and then there were changes in engineering administration.

"This was such a tragedy to this campus that we just sat still for a year. It took a long time for this college to heal," said Pam Becker, an administrator who helped organize the park's creation.

Enough time has passed that Ying Lowrey can smile again as she walks on the San Diego State campus, where she also was on the faculty until the memories became too painful.

Six months after her husband's murder, the Chinese orphan they had adopted, 8-year-old Nini, was struck by a car and killed along with her best friend as they dashed across a busy Rancho Peñasquitos road toward a playground.

A Yale-trained economist, Lowrey moved East with her son, Kendall, now 15, and works as an economist for the Small Business Administration.

She declined to speak at the memorial and instead asked a family friend to express her pleasure at the park, which he praised as a great linking of the past to the future, saying, "This memorial is appropriate because it's open, to the sky, to dreams, to ideas."

Chen Laing's widow, Baihong Laing, has changed little since the tragedy. Their sons, Jessie and George, are now 11 and 8, respectively, and attending Poway Unified schools. "This is where my sons can know their father, they can drive by and see daddy's school," she said.

Deana Lyrantzis, too, stayed in San Diego to keep her roots growing and her memories alive, for herself and for their daughter. "Same house, same pictures, I didn't change anything. I want my daughter to know her father."

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