

## Woodbridge High dedicates bench to car crash victim



{Submitted photo by Leon Reed}

Natalie Baird, 16, remembers Shelby Nicholson at the dedication of a memorial garden at Woodbridge Senior High School on Wednesday.

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By [URIAH A. KISER](#)

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Dedicating a memorial garden to a child isn't most parents' idea of the perfect birthday gift. But that is what Stacy Nicholson and about 100 others did at Woodbridge High School on Wednesday.

Shelby Brooke Nicholson, Stacy Nicholson's daughter, would have turned 17 yesterday. She died in a car accident on Old Bridge Road in January.

A bench engraved with the words "In loving memory" is now the centerpiece of the school's memorial garden.

Alexandra Homegardner, 17, who was friends with Nicholson at Woodbridge High School, thought of the memorial the day after her friend was killed.

"Shelby wanted to be a fashion designer and she would talk about calling her handbag line 'Shelby Fiasco,' so that is where we got the idea to plant the 'Fiasco Tree' next to the bench," said Homegardner.

Even the flowers that will be planted around the tree are called “Shelby’s Memory,” she said.

Many of Nicholson’s friends spoke following the unveiling of the bench.

Most described the girl as loving, happy and full of life.

School Principal David Huckestein said he got to know Nicholson because she always wore a Pittsburgh Steelers shirt around school.

One girl, who wrote a poem about the late teen, wondered why Nicholson did not buckle her seatbelt the night of the crash, and asked “Why do we have to be without a friend because God wanted her to be with him?”

“I was the last person to see her, and it’s really hard, and I’m trying not to cry because I am really tired of it. . .I need to be happy because she’d be pissed off if she knew that I wasn’t happy,” said Natalie Baird, 16, who was driving the car when Nicholson was killed.

Baird suffered a fractured skull, torn kidney and a broken pelvis in the accident. It took weeks for her to recover.

At the end of the ceremony, well wishers sang Happy Birthday to Nicholson and released balloons.

Nicholson’s grandmother, Pat Daubenspeck, selected the bench in her granddaughter’s memory. She said the memorial dedication helped to bring closure to Nicholson’s life.

“It’s hard to order something like this because it just doesn’t feel right. But we made sure that it said ‘In loving memory’, and that’s just what it means because we loved her so much,” said Daubenspeck.

Baird and Nicholson were headed home from the mall on a rainy night when Baird’s 2005 Chevy Aveo slid off westbound Old Bridge Road and collided with an SUV traveling east toward Tacketts Mill.

It happened between Forest Hill Road and Colby Drive, on a four-lane road that swoops down into a gully and crosses over a stream, forming a dangerous S curve.

The posted speed limit there is 45 mph.

The crash sent Baird, the 22-year-old driver of the SUV and her 56-year-old passenger to the hospital.

Nicholson was killed on impact, fire and rescue officials said.

Less than a week after Nicholson was killed, the Virginia Department of Transportation announced improvements to the westbound half-mile stretch of road.

Now the first orange barrels stand along the road, indicating the work has begun.

The improvements will include higher banked curves; a wider, flatter shoulder that will provide an emergency pull-off area for drivers; and a longer guardrail.

And while the 45 mph speed limit will remain, a new suggested safe speed limit of 25 mph will go up later this summer.

Staff writer Uriah A. Kiser can be reached at 703-878-8065.

## **Reader Reactions**

Posted by ( Col Stryker ) on April 23, 2009 at 7:41 am

Well phdee, your doctorate apparently does not make you smart. The trees being removed along Old Bridge are for a different project. They are finally installing the pedestrian walkways that have been on the books for years and completely isolated from this road improvement project.

It is also apparent that your degree is not in engineering so why don't you leave that to the experts.

We lost a wonderful young lady here as evident in the turn out for the memorial garden creation. Give us a break.

### Report Inappropriate Comment

Posted by ( phdee ) on April 23, 2009 at 5:34 am

Speeding and inattention is the main problem. Longer guardrails, higher banks, etc. aren't going to make a difference.

I noticed recently that some pine trees along the shoulder/embankment have been cut, leaving tall stumps. Must be someone's belief that cutting the trees removes the problem of a car running to a tree when leaving the road.

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Page 1 of 1