

Coalminers Tribute Planned in Olyphant

By Patti Knoepfel
Advantage Editor

The Olyphant Coalminers Association is seeking donations to erect a memorial to coalminers.

The statue will be erected on top of the dike by the bridge separating Olyphant and Blakely, near where the Olyphant flood project was completed. The site was donated by the Army Corp of Engineers.

The sculpture will be a life-sized monument. It will be a working statue with a head lamp that will shimmer from red to orange to yellow to symbolize a flame, the association's eternal representation of miners who lost their lives.

Artist Frank Wysochansky, a native of Blakely, where his father died in the coal mines, designed the sculpture in the early 1980s. A self-taught artist, he used mixed media to capture the life of the coalminer as no other artist could. He acted as an historian of mining lore and practice, and each painting and sculpture is a record of the actual techniques and mining gear used during the heyday of anthracite mining of the coal pits.

Wysochansky went beyond mere realism in his work--his art is a representation of the heroism and spirit that the coalminer brought to the United States of America. His work has given people a striking symbol of the invincibility of the immigrant miner who helped build industrial America.

The sculpture is being donated for the committee to use by Wysochansky's family and Stephen J. Lichak, an art agent at Lehigh University.

The association is setting up ward captains in the community to distribute donation packets. Ward captains include



Shown above is a picture of the sculpture that will be erected as a memorial to coalminers in Olyphant. It was designed by Frank Wysochansky, a Blakely native whose father was killed in the mines.

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Shown above are members of the committee involved with erecting a sculpture in Olyphant as a memorial to coalminers. From left to right, are Judy Hooper, secretary; Mark Zinskie, project engineer; Gene Turko, chairman; Jason Luke, project engineer; Jayme Morano, mayor of Olyphant; Jerry Chelak, treasurer; Sam Taffera, treasurer, and Stephen Klem III, project engineer.

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Sara Sanko, first ward; Sammy Taffera, second ward; Gene Liberty, third ward, and Shawn Inshetski and John Gillar, fourth ward. Donation cards are also available at the Olyphant Convenient and the Olyphant Post Office, or by calling Steve Klem at 383-9076.

The Olyphant Coalminers Association began September 6, 2004 with five members, and has grown to 14 members. The purpose of the group is to build a memorial to coalminers who worked in and to those who lost their lives in the coal mines.

Stephen Klem III and Gene turko began the committee to erect the coalminers' memorial. Klem's inspiration was his grandfather, Stephen Klem Sr. and his great-grandfather, Charles Klem.

Stephen Klem Sr., who is a member of the association, was a coalminer for 17 years with the Hudson Coal Company, and Charles Klem was killed in the Olyphant mines.

Turko's inspiration came from his father-in-law, a coalminer in Olyphant who passed away from emphysema.

Olyphant has a rich history of coalmining. The town began as part of Blakely Township. Even before Olyphant was incorporated as a separate borough in 1877, it was called Olyphant in honor of George Talbot Olyphant, president of the Delaware

and Hudson Company.

Settlement in Olyphant was slow until the development of the coal industry. Then the town really took off, thanks in large part to Edward Jones, who organized the firm of Edward Jones and Company with Louis Pugh and Abel Barker in 1858, and the following year shipped 80,000 tons of coal.

Early settlers in Olyphant were mainly Welsh, Irish and English, but in later years, many Polish, Ukrainians, Russians and Slovaks made the borough their home.

In the early coalmining days of the town, breaker boys, who were around the age of 10, were paid 35-50 cents per day, and a sledgehammer was the primary means of preparing coal output, which was sold locally for \$1 per ton. Later the coal was shipped via the D&H Gravity.

Mining was the chief industry in Olyphant, although a few other businesses existed, but eventually other businesses were established, and are still thriving today.

Members of the committee include project engineers Mark Zinskie, Jason Luke, and Stephen Klem III; Gene Turko, chairman; Stephen Klem Sr., vice chairman; Sam Taffera and Jerry Chelak, treasurers; Judy Hooper, secretary; Olyphant Mayor Jayme Morano, and Stephen Lichak.