

## Cedar Hill pet cemetery holds dedication ceremony for War Dog Monument

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J.R. Podany, a corporal with the Cedar Hill Police Department, has been working with Titus, a Belgian Malinois, for more than a year. The

dog, which is part of the department's K-9 Unit, is trained to detect drugs, track criminals, search for evidence and protect its handler.



Attendees take photos of the War Dog memorial at Cedar Hill Pet Memorial Park. Plots are available to military and law enforcement service animals at no

In their short time together, Titus has proven himself, Podany said.

“It’s exciting and rewarding to see all the training you have put in pay off,” Podany said.

Now, Titus will keep watch over Cedar Hill Pet Memorial Park. His likeness was used as the model for “Enduring Valor,” a bronze statue at the cemetery that honors the work of service animals.

The statue was dedicated May 31 and placed at the back of the property, where the nonprofit that runs the cemetery plans to set aside plots for service animals. More than 100 people attended the ceremony.

Nic Collins, an Air Force veteran, said the idea originated two years ago when members of the cemetery’s support organization felt there was something missing: a tribute to service animals. Collins said he believes the War Dog Monument is the third of its type in Texas.

“War dogs haven’t been honored in the past,” said David Appel, treasurer for the Cedar Hill Pet Memorial Project.

The plots available to military and law enforcement service animals will be offered at no cost. Owners do pay for the gravestones for their service animals.

“We want to raise awareness about what these dogs do,” said Theresa Brandon, chairwoman of the Cedar Hill Pet Memorial Project. The cause is a personal one for Brandon, a former Marine. She served alongside a military dog named Chopper.

It took the nonprofit two years to raise funds for the War Dog Monument, Brandon said. The group still has to raise more money to complete the monument. The organization has received several donations, including granite for the plaque.

Dallas resident Eric Vidal, 54, said he remembered visiting the pet cemetery when he was young. His father buried his boxer, Butch, there in 1964.

The event was special not only for Vidal, but for Vidal’s fiancé, Dotti Hinkle, who said she invested time in training her German shepherd, Katie Lynn. Though her dog was not buried at the cemetery, the mission of the nonprofit resonated with Hinkle, whose 6-year-old dog died in November after a tumor was found.

She was not able to put into practice what she taught Katie Lynn, but said a strong bond was formed nonetheless.

“You spend every day with each other. There’s really no off day,” Hinkle said.

Many service dogs are trained for dangerous situations in which they must protect their handler, Podany said. It’s that loyalty, members of the nonprofit say, that is being honored with the monument.

“He’s trained to do this and wants to do it,” Podany said.

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## **PET CEMETERY**

Cedar Hill Pet Memorial Park

**Where:** 1210 J. Elmer Weaver Freeway, Cedar Hill.

**Cost:** Pricing for private burials, based on the size of the pet, ranges from \$275 to \$475. No cost for plots for military and law enforcement service animals.

**More info:** call 800-818-8251 or visit [cedarhillpetcemetery.org](http://cedarhillpetcemetery.org)

## **BY THE NUMBERS**

**550+** Animals in cemetery. The exact number is unknown because some of the records have been lost and markers are missing

**1930s.** Pets date back through several decades

**14** States where people reside and have pets buried at Cedar Hill Memorial Park

**3** Horses buried at the cemetery