

Dedication by Michael O'Connell on behalf of Alexander's Angels

I want to start with the thank yous. Once I start talking about the kids I may not be able to get to them.

On behalf of Alexander's Angels I want to thank DDI and specifically the Ronkonkoma campus for your support and effort here today and everyday with all the children. You are all such bright spots in our children's lives. Thank you for providing us a venue to put together this gesture for our two little angels. When Esther and I had our initial conversations about what Alexander's Angels could do to celebrate these two children, something organic was always the plan. A tree or garden was an easy decision but where to put them was difficult. DDI topped the list for locations because it had been a common thread for both children. Since my own son Mickey attends DDI, I had access to some of the staff and asked for their input. Immediately they all spoke to how great it would be and what could they do to help. Totally what I expected from some of the best people I've met in my life. I was able to speak briefly with Meryl Teitelbaum and the ball was rolling. Approvals came in and we were ready to go.

Now we had to actually build it.

We had a meeting here at the site. The bench, plaque, and statues were ordered and, another meeting. 4000 emails from Esther, and another meeting. Finally Jonathan Minnette, owner of Decoro Landscaping stepped up to the plate for us. We all had visions in our heads of what it could be. He had the tools and talent to make it what you see here today. He deserves a tremendous thank you for this.

Of course the most important thank you of all goes to Sue, John, Cassidy, Sharon, Skye, and Tony. You have all allowed us the opportunity to celebrate the lives of Sienna and Shane. For Alexander's Angels these two special kids brought two tremendous teams to our annual Buddy Walks. Sienna's Heart is a team that came to us in our 3rd Buddy Walk in 2009 and has continued to celebrate with us. Shane's Dreams joined us for the 2nd Buddy Walk in 2008. Both teams were a huge part of this past Buddy Walk, our 6th, at Tanner Park in 2012 as it was dedicated to Sienna and Shane. I hope you all continue to come and celebrate with us for years to come.

This was important to me to be able to contribute to something special for these children. You all were not just part of the same community for me, you are all my friends. I met Sharon, Tony, and Sienna in a PT class on Fridays when both were just little babies. Some of the most fun, educational days were spent in that class with Mickey driving Sienna crazy pulling her ponytails. Her strong personality was shining through every day. Doing what she wanted WHEN she wanted. Thank you for letting me be a part of that.

The Brennans and my family have actually known each other for about 40 years. My father and John's father worked together in NY City Sanitation and have been friends ever since. I remember John when we were both kids probably 5-8 years old. Our son's Shane and Mickey were born about 3 months apart. Shane was ahead of Mickey in school and Sue and John's recommendation was a big factor in bringing us here to DDI.

I know nothing could ever replace either child but I hope this garden can be a symbol of simpler and happier times for both your families.

So again, I would like to thank everyone involved in making this Garden a reality.