

Victims of Flight PS752 to have lasting memorial in Richmond Hill

On the sixth anniversary of the downing of Ukraine International Airlines 752, a crash which claimed the lives of 176 people, including one Aurora dentist and her young daughter, the Province of Ontario announced support of a lasting memorial to the victims.

Contributions to the construction of a memorial was announced in Richmond Hill on Thursday by Ontario's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Graham McGregor, who noted the Province will transfer \$350,000 to the City of Richmond Hill for its completion.

The Flight PS752 Memorial represents a collaboration between the City of Richmond Hill, provincial and federal governments. Construction is set to begin mid-2026 and is expected to be completed in 2027, said the Province in a statement. Designed by the City of Richmond Hill in partnership with families of the victims, the memorial will feature a series of steel panels and an engraved granite base listing all names, along with accessible pathways and integrated lighting. It will serve as a civic landmark in Richmond Hill's Unity Park, creating a public space that honours the lives lost.

Flight 752, which was shot down over Iran by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard on January 8, 2020, claimed the lives of 176 people, including 55 Canadian citizens and 30 permanent residents including Dr. Parisa Eghbalian and her daughter Reera Esmaeilion. Dr. Eghbalian, who was born and raised in Iran, was co-owner of Aurora E&E Dentistry on Wellington Street East with her husband, Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion.

The couple also ran practices in Caledon and Richmond Hill.

The lives of the victims were remembered in a special ceremony held Thursday at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.

We are deeply grateful for the Government of Ontario's approval of permanent funding for the Flight PS752 memorial in Richmond Hill, said Kouros Doustshenas, Spokesperson and Chair of the Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims. Combined with the previously announced federal funding and the strong support of the City of Richmond Hill, this commitment allows us to move forward with a dignified, permanent space to honour the 176 innocent victims of this tragic crime. This memorial will be a place of remembrance, reflection, and collective mourning ensuring that the lives lost on Flight PS752 are never forgotten and that the pursuit of truth and justice remains alive in our community.

Gratitude was also expressed by Richmond Hill Mayor David West, who said in a statement: I'm so thankful for this provincial funding, which combined with the previously announced Federal funding and Richmond Hill's own contribution, will enable our City to create a memorial for the victims of the tragic downing of Flight PS752 in 2020. This will give our community a dedicated space to collectively mourn our families and friends, and ensure that we will never forget.

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, Ontario's Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, himself of Iranian heritage, said he expressed his deepest gratitude to the Association for their efforts in making the memorial a reality.

Our government is proud to stand with the victims' families and to honour the memory of those we lost on that terrible day six years ago, he said.

Added Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Costas Menegakis, who attended the Richmond Hill Centre observance: It was very emotional to hear from the family members who lost loved ones in this act of terror six years ago. Time may pass, but closure is not possible without accountability. I stand in solidarity with the families and all my friends in the Iranian community. I was so deeply moved by the heart-wrenching stories of the families of the victims. The front row of the theatre was occupied by the mothers whose children were killed in this tragic, senseless, and barbaric act against innocent people. To this day, justice has not been served on those responsible.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter