



The Becker family stands behind Andy's bench.



Two of Andy's friends in the Air Force pay their respects at his memorial outside the Novi Civic Center.

Time is our most valuable commodity

Air Force family who lost son encourages others to act now

Time. It's the one commodity in this world that – no matter how hard we try – can never be replenished. For our men and women in the military, time is their biggest sacrifice. They miss holidays, birthdays, weddings and funerals to serve our country and protect our way of life.

And for some, like Air Force Major Andrew Becker, time runs out before we think it should. Becker, who grew up in Novi and whose parents Gary and Stacey Becker still live here, died last March during a training exercise in New Mexico. Some people may say that his death is a debt that could never be repaid, but his father doesn't necessarily agree.

"When we talk about how we can honor our military and our veterans, we can do what they did," Gary said. "They sacrificed their time, and if all of us were to sacrifice just a little bit of our time in the same way Andy was fighting a war, we could use our time to fight injustice and oppression, reach out to those in need and make the world a better place.

"We don't have to go into the military, but just take some of our time and if we do it all together then I think we repay the debt many times over and we can

make this nation worthy of their sacrifice."

It's a profound concept and one, as Memorial Day approaches on Monday, May 28, we should all spend a little more time thinking about.

"It's so human to think 'there's always tomorrow and I'll get to that,' but you have to take the opportunity to actually do it because tomorrow might not be here," Gary said.

Andy's story

It was just a couple weeks after September 11, 2001, when Andy, a Novi High senior, sat down with his family at dinner and told them, "I'm going into the Air Force and I'm going to be a pilot and join the fight because this country is now at war and I'm going to protect us, our country and our way of life here."

Obviously, it was a lot for mom and dad to take in, but "you support them, you love them and pray for them and let them go do what they are going to do," Gary said.

What Andy did is nothing short of exceptional. He was deployed nine times to fly 459 combat missions, logging 2,260 hours in Afghanistan, Iraq and undisclosed other countries. He was

Novi Memorial Day Parade

When: 10 a.m., Monday, May 28

Where: Parade goes down 10 Mile from Karim Boulevard to the Novi Civic Center. Memorial Service will be held at the Veteran's Memorial in front of the Civic Center.

Get Involved: To be part of the parade, call 248.347.0400 or complete the registration form at cityofnovi.org/MemorialDay.

awarded 22 Air Force service medals, including a Meritorious Service medal, and was THE instructor up-and-coming pilots wanted to learn from.

While the numbers stand out, it was who Andy was as a person that truly cemented his legacy. His nickname of "LLAFR" (pronounced "Laughter") was an acronym only those closest to him knew the meaning, but summed him up perfectly. No one ever had to ask if Major Becker was around because you always heard his unique laugh.

"He was a very unselfish person and if he could do something to help someone else he would," said Stacey. "In his mind, he was second and everyone else was first."

Following his death, Gary and Stacey

were inundated with stories about their son, how he always made people feel welcome, how he saved lives and how he set the standard for pilots in the Air Force. The Beckers hoped they raised a good son, and the outpouring of support confirmed that.

"He died doing what he loved, and he loved flying," Stacey said.

Paying our respects

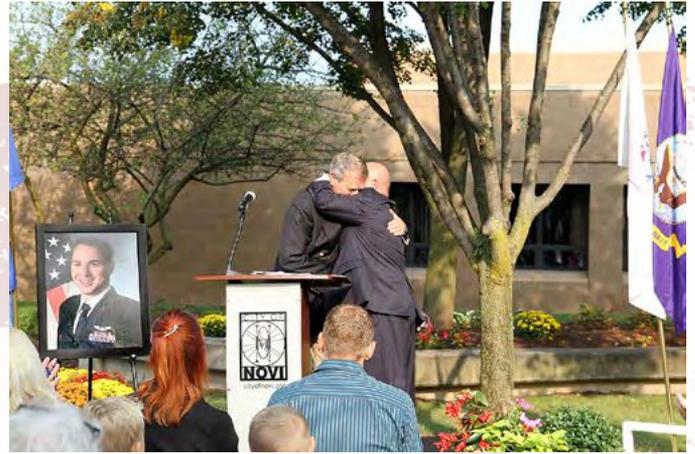
Last fall, at the request of Mayor Bob Gatt, the City of Novi did its part to ensure Andy's courage and sacrifice will never be forgotten. Outside the Novi Civic Center now sits "Andy's Bench," complete with a pair of bronzed boots, a memorial tree and a plaque highlighting Andy's accomplishments.

Family and friends came from all over the United States to remember Andy at a special ceremony, tell stories, shed tears, and, of course, laugh. The memorial serves as a fitting reminder for not just Andy's family, but for the families of all those who have lost someone in the military.

"His legacy because of what he did and how he conducted himself will touch people in a lot of ways and a lot of places," Gary said. "And every time someone walks by that bench going into city hall that will be part of Andy's legacy, too."

Join us on Memorial Day

Memorial Day in Novi has always been special as the residents here take a great deal of pride in honoring those who sacrificed their lives in the name of freedom.



Novi Mayor Bob Gatt shares a moment with Andy's father, Gary Becker.

It starts with the annual Novi Memorial Day Run before 10 Mile Road fills with people marching and enjoying the parade. A memorial service brings the event to a close as we remember those who died and recognize those who have served or are currently serving our country.

The City is always looking for more participation from residents and veterans. Novi civic organizations, businesses, bands, scout troops and families are encouraged to march, and veterans can either ride in a vehicle or walk the parade route.

For more information about the Novi Memorial Day Parade, call 248.347.0410 or visit cityofnovi.org/MemorialDay.



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