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Friends of Alta hope to replace plaques this fall

Memorial Grove • Signs had little monetary value, but meant a lot to fans of canyon.

BY MIKE GORRELL THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

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When the leaves in upper Little Cottonwood Canyon begin changing colors this fall, Friends of Alta hopes to right a wrong.

The nonprofit group is planning an autumn ceremony to re-install and dedicate a pair of plaques that pay homage to the canyon's remarkable features and individuals who helped shape how humans fit in there.

Sometime late last fall or during the winter, they were stolen from the Town of Alta Memorial Grove, partway up the Albion Basin road.

Thieves took an anodized aluminum plate with etchings of the canyon rim — from Mount Superior through Mount Baldy to Devil's Castle — that was donated originally by Duane and Jody Shrontz. She was the granddaughter of Alta co-founder Joseph Quinney.

They also removed a plate honoring late Alta Mayor William Levitt. Attached to a bench in the grove, his plate said "Peace and Powder Snow."

"As a community, we're kind of bummed someone would come and do this sort of thing," said Jen Clancy, executive director of Friends of Alta, a conservation organization dedicated to protecting the canyon environment. "These are members of our community who contributed a lot to its well being."

She has spearheaded a drive to replace the memorial plaques, whose presence in Alta Memorial Grove required the town to obtain a special-use permit in 2007 from the U.S. Forest Service, which manages the land it's on.

"We worked and worked and worked a long time to get the Forest Service to approve the language on Duane and Jody's plaque," said Alta Town Administrator John Guldner. "It was really cool ... just beautifully etched."

Mimi Levitt, the late mayor's widow, discovered the pieces were missing after the snow melted and she was on a stroll with her dog, Daisy.

"I thought I'd just go into the Memorial Grove and see how it looks. It's a beautiful spot that overlooks all of that wonderful Alta terrain," she said. "But when I got there, son of a gun, the [Shrontz] plaque was gone off the wall. Then I went into the enclosure [of trees around William Levitt's bench] and Bill's plaque was gone. I was just sick."

Guldner suspects junkies stole the plaques, figuring incorrectly that they could sell them to a metal recycler for cash to buy drugs.

"They were made out of anodized aluminum — not brass even though they kind of look like it — so they're not really worth anything," he said. "It would be like turning in aluminum cans to the recycler. It would be like stealing a headstone."

Clancy has arranged to have the plaques redone by Cottonwood Heights-based Interpretive Graphics Signs & Systems, which etched the original mountain scene donated by the Shrontzes.

In the meantime, she's raising money to defray the costs. Donations are being accepted at Friends of Alta, P.O. Box 8126, Alta, 84092.

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To donate

Anyone interested in contributing to the restoration of the plaques should send their money to Friends of Alta, P.O. Box 8126, Alta, 84092.

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