

SOUTHWEST & MEXICO

Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Mexico
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A Gravemarker that has Solidified Social Awareness

Count Texas as one of those States where at times "balancing the budget" means "cutting help from the helpless."

In 2003, the Texas legislature drastically cut funding from Medicaid, children's health insurance, summer school, and child abuse prevention.

On Christmas day, 2004, 4-year-old Jovonie Ochoa died of starvation while other people in the house were celebrating the holiday. The San Antonio Express News in one article stated that "...he had been starved and beaten while tied to a top bunk, his hands, mouth and feet duct taped. He weighed 16 pounds when his lifeless body was rushed to a hospital" (10.10.04). In a separate article, the same newspaper reported that "His body was so emaciated and covered in sores that a detective said he looked like an alien, and medical personnel wept when his body was brought to the emergency room, alone" (12.25.04).

The publicity of Jovonie's death gradually resulted in statewide awareness of hundreds of similar cases. Early in January of this year,

a Governor's Task Force recommended reforms to the entire Texas child welfare system.

Locally the social awareness resulted in contributions to a memorial for Jovonie Ochoa. Hillcrest Funeral Home donated the grave space in Wildflower Cemetery. According to Hillcrest's Joanne Bernal the cemetery was founded and then abandoned by Montes De La Cruces, a society created strictly for the burial of neighborhood residents. Hillcrest Funeral Home purchased the cemetery several years ago from an independent realtor.

Hillcrest Funeral Home also collected donations to cover the cost of the black granite marker, accompanying bench, and part of the costs of creating and setting up the monument.



Hurly Monument Company of Pleasanton, Texas, donated its time and effort on the project--designing the two-part monument and charging only cost for the set up. Patrick Hurley and Brad Graybill chose to use English for all inscriptions, which were flat carved with gold lithochrome lettering. They initially laser etched the photo of Jovonie then added the color by hand. Using the artistic device of placing part of the photo outside the oval border, Jovonie gives the virtual-reality impression that he is crawling on the floor. Hurley and Graybill selected the statue because it showed Mary with children; added the vase for the flowers that mourners would bring to the graveside.



Patrick Hurley contributed the accompanying photo of the poem carved into the back of the four-foot marker. I took the photo of the decorated marker and bench, just after New Year's visitations by Jovonie Ochoa's innumerable sympathizers.

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