Gathering Marks 50 Years since Deadly Blast

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (AP) — An explosion at a Terre Haute meatpacking plant that killed 17 workers still leaves scars within the community 50 years later.

Dozens of people, including survivors and relatives of those killed in the Jan. 2, 1963, blast, gathered Wednesday for a memorial service at the former site of the Home Packing Co. where the only remaining sign of the plant is a building cornerstone.

The more than 50 people held hands in a circle as some spoke and offered prayers to the group, which also sang "Amazing Grace" and other songs, the Tribune-Star reported (http://bit.ly/ZfI4D4 [1]).

Carl Bender took part in a balloon release, letting one go in honor of his father, who died in the explosion.

"It doesn't seem like it's been that long," Bender said. "It's humbling to think that it has been."

The blast, possibly caused by a buildup of natural gas, imploded one-third of the two-story brick meat processing plant near the city's downtown. In addition to those killed, more than 50 workers were injured.

Mary Ann Brunette Sedletzeck, who was 8 years old at the time of the explosion, recalled the anxiety of waiting to learn the fate of her father, Ed Brunette, a foreman at the plant.

"They came and got us out of school and told us my dad had been in the explosion," she said. "I can remember being in the living room and waiting — just waiting, waiting, waiting forever and ever. He had stayed to try and rescue his friends.

"I can remember when the car pulled in the driveway and my mom falling to her knees; she easily could have been a widow with six children," said Sedletzeck, who is a teacher in Paris, Ill.

The plant, which covered about two city blocks and employed about 300 people, didn't resume operations after the explosion, citing financial losses from the damage.

Some residents have asked that a memorial plaque be installed at the factory site, which is now owned by Indiana State University.

The university plans to build a new track and field facility on the property and would be willing to consider installation of the plaque, school spokesman Dave Taylor said.

Jeanette Ellingsworth, who lost her then 23-year-old brother, Joe Callahan, in the explosion, helped organize the memorial gathering.

"It was good to know there's so many people that remembered, that I wasn't the only one feeling those things," she said. "The whole community was feeling those things."

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Information from: Tribune-Star, http://www.tribstar.com *[2]*

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