



Mass, Square Dedication Will Mark Gas Disaster Anniversary

All three communities will participate in the events scheduled for Friday morning in Lawrence.

By [Dave Copeland](#) | Sep 10, 2019 11:50 am ET | Updated Sep 10, 2019 12:05 pm ET



A square in Lawrence will be named after Leonel Rondon, the lone fatality in last year's Merrimack Valley gas explosions. (Rondon Family/Courtesy photo.)

LAWRENCE, MA — The first anniversary of the Merrimack Valley gas explosions will be marked with a mass at 9:30 a.m. Friday at St Mary's Church on Haverhill Street in Lawrence. The mass will be followed with the dedication of "Leonel Rondon Square" at 11 a.m. on Chestnut Street in Lawrence. Officials and residents from Andover, North Andover and Lawrence will participate in the remembrances.

Rondon, 18, was parked in the driveway of his family's Lawrence home when the house was flattened by an explosion and a chimney collapsed onto the SUV. The house was one of more than 130 buildings damaged or destroyed in Lawrence, Andover and North Andover in the Sept. 13 gas explosions. A passenger in the car suffered severe injuries, while two other passengers escaped unscathed.

Rondon's family [sued Columbia and its parent company](#) in October. The [wrongful death lawsuit was settled](#) in July. The National Transportation Safety Board, which is still working on its investigation, has blamed the explosions on [over-pressurization in gas lines](#). Dozens were injured; Rondon was the only fatality.

Doug Sheff, attorney for the Rondon family, said at the time of the settlement his law firm will establish a scholarship fund designed to encourage an ongoing interest in public safety and community service. He said Rondon loved music and science and had hoped to go to college. "He was only 18 years old and full of life," Sheff said. "He dreamt of going to college and cared for his family members in every way possible. His mother, Rosaly, described Leonel as 'the happiness of the house'."

Other Events Will Mark The Anniversary

In Andover, the town will hold a ceremony from 3 to 6 p.m. Friday in front of the Old Town Hall on Main Street.

"As Andover continues through the recovery process from last year's gas disaster, it is important to take the opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary efforts displayed by our residents and businesses during the most challenging of times," said Town Manager Andrew P. Flanagan. "We are a stronger community today than we were a year ago and it is a direct result of the resiliency of those who live and work in Andover. I hope our community can come together on Friday afternoon and take advantage of all downtown Andover has to offer. Community has been the theme of this past year and I look forward to it being on full display this Friday."

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