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Square Dedicated To Leonel Rondon, 1 Year After Merrimack Valley Gas Explosions

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LAWRENCE (CBS) – The Merrimack Valley communities marked the one year anniversary of the [gas disaster](#) by holding a memorial service and dedicating a greenway to Leonel Rondon, who lost his life as a result of the explosions. Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera spoke along with Gov. Charlie Baker, Sen. Ed Markey, and Congresswoman Lori Trahan.

“This is what we have to do because we want to make sure people don’t ever forget...that a life was lost, a beautiful life was lost. Like when we do this for soldiers, we want people to walk by and see the sign and say ‘I wonder who that was,’” said Rivera. “And we hope when they come by that sign they are going to say ‘I remember that kid.’”

A sign marking Leonel A. Rondon Square was placed on Chestnut Street Friday, not far from where he lived with his family.



The Leonel A. Rondon Square (WBZ-TV)

“This is unnecessary. This should be the last time. This should be the last time that we name a street or corner or anything after a child who lost his life for some uselessness. For recklessness,” said Rivera.

The mayor took time to thank many first responders and politicians

who worked to help victims and get answers from utility company Columbia Gas. He mentioned the significance of Sen. Ed Markey bringing the [Senate hearing](#) to Lawrence as opposed to holding it in Washington D.C.



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The accident was not inevitable, it was preventable. Leonel's death never had to have occurred," said Markey.

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He, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, and Trahan introduced the [Leonel Rondon Safety Pipeline Act in April](#). It focuses on saving lives and holding utility companies like Columbia Gas responsible. One of the major takeaways is the punishment would go up 100 fold.

"So to the family of Leonel, we express our greatest sympathy, but know, that in his name, in your family's name, there will be

hundreds of thousands of lives which are saved in the future because of the sacrifice which you have made," Markey said.

- [WATCH: Merrimack Valley Gas Explosions, One Year Later](#)

Baker also mentioned the importance of keeping Leonel's spirit alive through regulation. "He will be for us, and I believe for many others, a constant reminder of the vigilance that's required of government and the entities we regulate and oversee."

The governor acknowledged how Leonel's death displayed life's fragility. "It spoke to the fact that it's critically important for those of us in public life recognize and appreciate that everyone has a story. Leonel had a story. That plaque right there is going to speak to his story forever. His story was a life lost too young through no fault of his own because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time when a terrible tragedy occurred."

Leonel Rondon (Facebook photo)

"It's important that his life matters. That his time here mattered," Baker added.

Lawyer Doug Sheff also spoke on behalf of the Rondon family. "When the Rondon's see this beautiful sign, they will see Leonel. They will see his smile, they will hear his music, and they will feel his love. Nothing can replace him. He was the heart and soul of this fine and decent family," he said.

Federal investigators said the explosions and fires were triggered by over-pressurized gas lines. Dozens of people were injured and more than 100 buildings and homes were damaged.

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CBS Boston

