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City of Plano Memorial Day Keynote Speaker Named

Deputy Mayor Pro Tem and Memorial Day Observance Chairman Lee Dunlap has announced Ms. Leila Hunt-Willingham as the City of Plano Memorial Day Observance keynote speaker. The Observance will be held Monday, May 31, 2010, 8:30 a.m., Plano Municipal Center, 1520 K Avenue.

Ms. Hunt-Willingham is the sister of Army Specialist Jason Dean Hunt, one of 13 soldiers killed when a gunman opened fire November 5, 2009 at a Fort Hood soldier readiness center. The incident also left 32 persons wounded in the worst mass shooting at a United States military base.

Spc. Hunt, 22, enlisted in the Army in 2006, spending his 21st birthday in Iraq. While there he chose to re-enlist and was set for his second deployment to Iraq. Originally stationed in Fort Stewart, Georgia after high school, he had transferred to Fort Hood to be closer to his family. He was at the Soldier Readiness Processing Center waiting to get inoculations prior to joining his division in Iraq when he was killed.

An infantry soldier, Spc. Hunt was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division's 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team and is survived by his wife Jennifer (Morgan) Hunt. They married in August 2009 just two months prior to his death. Voted "most quiet" in his senior class at Tipton High School he was remembered for his gentle and unassuming manner in his hometown of Tipton, Oklahoma.

"JD" as he was known to his family, shared a special bond with his sister who he considered a confidant and credited with being a consistent and major influence in his life.

In her family Web blog Ms. Hunt-Willingham wrote about JD's influence on the lives of her two children. "Although the pain of losing their Uncle Jason may not feel as great to them as mine of losing my baby brother, they have also lost a great part of their future. But they deserve what Uncle Jason fought for them to have...the right to live freely and remember his sacrifice not only as their Uncle, but truly as an American Hero. JD has set a great example for my children to live a life as selfless and loving as he did."

A McKinney, Texas resident, Ms. Hunt-Willingham is determined to keep not only her brother's memory alive, but that of the other 12 soldiers also killed that day.

She actively builds awareness through her involvement in the creation of the Fort Hood Living Memorial Garden and is pursuing Congress to approve Purple Heart medals for the fallen and wounded from November 5. She completed the Dallas Rock 'n Roll Half Marathon to honor JD and his fallen comrades, and is involved in the planning of a Memorial Half Marathon in remembrance of the victims of the Fort Hood shooting and their families, scheduled to take place November 6, 2010 as part of a weekend of remembrances on the one year anniversary of the Fort Hood tragedy.

Ms. Hunt-Willingham is also working with the military to create a better understanding and awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "The nature of my brother's death has truly shed light on this issue and it has become something important to me to highlight and address."

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