

August 30, 2016

Mayor & Council
The Borough of Roselle Park
110 Westfield Avenue
Roselle Park, NJ 07204

Mayor & Council:

I am writing in regard to the kneeling soldier memorial that currently stands in front of the library. As you may recall, at the council meeting on August 18, I offered to donate a similar memorial, but with a Star of David. That offer seemed to be well-received, but as was indicated that night by Mr. Domanski, he will be making that donation. Since he has Jewish veterans in his family, I feel that he is the better donor for this memorial. But I am a man of my word, so I still would like to donate a memorial.

The cross in the current memorial is known as a Latin cross. While some see it merely as a grave marker, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs recognizes the Latin cross as a symbol of Christianity, just as it recognizes the Star of David as a symbol of Judaism, and the Crescent and Star as a symbol of Islam (source: <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hmm/emblems.asp>). The memorial I will be donating features another symbol recognized by the VA, representing a group of people who serve their country with just as much pride as any religious soldiers do, but ironically, is continually viewed as one of the least trusted segments of society. I would like to spotlight one soldier in particular, and the sacrifice he made for our country.

Patrick Daniel Tillman was born on November 6, 1976, the same year as our country's bicentennial. During high school, Pat excelled at football, and eventually went on to play for Arizona State University. He led ASU to the 1997 Rose Bowl after an undefeated season, and earned three consecutive selections to the Pac-10 All-Academic Football Team. He also excelled academically, earning a B.S. in Marketing, graduating Summa Cum Laude from ASU's W.P. Carey School of Business in three and a half years. In 1998, the Arizona Cardinals selected Pat in the 7th round of the NFL draft. He became the team's starting safety and broke the franchise record for tackles in 2000 with 224.

On September 11, 2001, the country was rocked by one of the most devastating terrorist attacks in history. The day after, Pat told a reporter, "At times like this you stop and think about just how good we have it, what kind of system we live in, and the freedoms we are allowed. A lot of my family has gone and fought in wars and I really haven't done a damn thing."

Eight months later, in May of 2002, Pat married his high school sweetheart, and upon his return from their honeymoon, he announced to the Cardinals that he would be putting his NFL career on hold to join the Army; to serve his country, Pat turned down a contract offer of \$3.6 million over three years. He became an Army Ranger, and was deployed to Afghanistan. On April 22, 2004, it was reported that Pat had been killed by enemy combatants, though his death was later ruled to have come from friendly fire. Pat posthumously received a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

Pat Tillman was an atheist. But he wasn't - and isn't - the only atheist to proudly serve his country. Every branch of the military contains its share of non-believers, who honor their duty to their country just as highly as any other soldier. And though Pat was open about his atheism, many servicemen must keep their views in the shadows, for fear that their beliefs will result in being ostracized by their fellow soldiers, or that it might mean a loss of promotion or other retribution from commanding officers - cases that have unfortunately been well-documented. These types of actions are the antithesis of what our country is supposed to stand for. These servicemen are making the ultimate sacrifice, and they do not deserve to be treated as second-class citizens solely because their beliefs differ from the majority. So this memorial will be for Pat and every other veteran who has not only fought for our country, but has also had to fight a persistent negative stereotype about atheists.

Attached is an image of the proposed memorial. It will be made of wood and will stand 48 inches high. You can see that it contains a kneeling soldier, emblazoned with the symbol for "atheist" as recognized by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (also see photo included showing this marker being used at Arlington National Cemetery). Along the bottom of the memorial will be this inscription:

"DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF PAT TILLMAN AND THE COUNTLESS ATHEISTS WHO BRAVELY FOUGHT FOR A PURPOSE GREATER THAN THEMSELVES - FREEDOM"

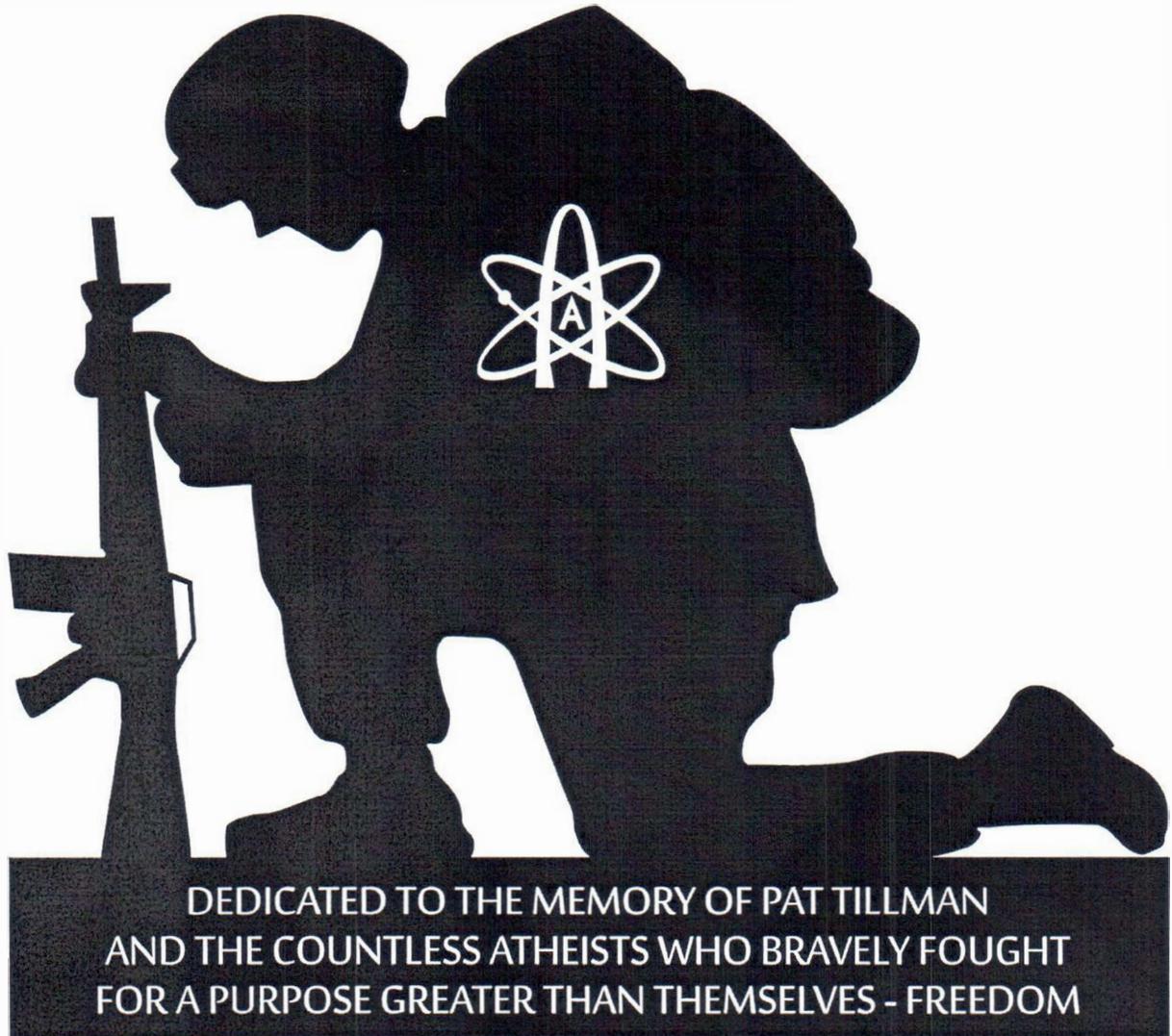
In addition to honoring these brave men and women, this memorial would be a sign that Roselle Park is inclusive, recognizing veterans of all faiths - or none at all.

I request that a resolution to approve this donation be added to the agenda of the next council meeting. I am happy to answer any questions or concerns you might have.

Tom Roché

Roselle Park, NJ 07204

Proposed Memorial



Dimensions: 48" high by 50" wide by 1" thick

Material: Wood

Example used on a gravestone:

