

Vandals, thieves hit new low by targeting monuments — Merced County Times

The Merced County Times





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Suspected vandals and/or thieves have stolen several bronze and brass plaques and signage from monuments on city property in Merced over the past three months — and restoring the damage is proving to be costly.

Apart from causing frustration among those community leaders who are making weekly cleanup efforts to beautify the city — such as Mayor Matthew Serratto and his team of volunteers — city officials estimate the cost to replace the plaques and signage will be more than \$40,000.

To make matters worse, some of the materials are on back order, and there's no clear timeline on when the monuments will be restored.

In late April, the plaque at the base of the Steven Stayner monument at Applegate Park was stolen. It told the story of Stayner's 1972 abduction in Merced and his heroic act of saving 5-year-old Timmy White and himself from captivity with a child molester.

Also at Applegate Park, a Blue Star tribute to the U.S. Armed Forces was taken from the U.S. flag pole area. This theft was quite a feat considering the location is protected by a tall metal fence with spikes at the top that would be difficult to climb and cross over.

“What's next?” one Times reader commented. “The names on the war memorial at Courthouse Park?”

Meanwhile, near the G Street Underpass, most of the golden letters that spell “Merced” were taken along with a city seal embedded in a monument that sits above the sidewalk along the northbound lanes.

On the railroad bridge of the underpass itself, a 2011 dedication plaque with the names of local leaders who worked on the \$18 million underpass project was also stolen, along with a few other ornamental markers on the structure. The dedication plaque was stolen right underneath a sign that

reads: “Warning: Under Video Surveillance”.

Nevertheless, the Merced Police Department has not made any arrests in the thefts and no suspects have been named, according to city officials.

Some suspect the theft and damage were caused by lawbreakers looking for copper-laced metals that can be exchanged for cash at scrapyards and recycling centers. The Stayner plaque theft also occurred after the worldwide release of the Hulu documentary TV series about the Stayner family story, raising speculation that it might have been stolen to be sold on the black market.



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