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Slain teacher's family appeals for public help

Jolene Cote found dead on Oct. 13

JANA G. PRUDEN
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 EDMONTON

Jolene Cote's mother and two sisters sat side by side Wednesday at the RCMP's Edmonton headquarters, their eyes tired and raw with tears, as they begged anyone with information about the slain teacher's death to come forward.

"We as a family believe that somebody out there must know something," said Cote's sister, Rhonda Berg, her voice quavering. "Maybe you can think back to Thursday, Oct. 13. Maybe you have had your suspicions about someone you know. Any information, as small as you may think it is, may lead to justice for Jolene and her family that is left behind to live this nightmare."

The women clutched hands at a table displaying three framed pictures of Cote. The three struggled through tears as they spoke.

Police have released no information about the circumstances around Cote's death at her Spruce Grove area home two weeks ago.

Investigators went to Cote's large, new home in a subdivision northeast of Spruce Grove at about 6 a.m. on Oct. 13 after a 911 call about an "injured person." RCMP found Cote dead at the scene. Her death was a homicide, but the results of an autopsy weren't made public, nor were the circumstances around the 36-year-old's death, including any information about where, how and what time she was killed. RCMP are similarly tight-lipped about whether investigators have any suspects or persons of interest.

Cote was known as a popular Grade 9 teacher and coach. About 1,000 people attended her memorial service last week, including many current and former students, and staff from Greystone Centennial School.

RCMP Sgt. Tim Taniguchi acknowledged the case is on the minds of many in the community, but said decisions about what information

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Watch a video of slain teacher Jolene Cote's family asking for help in the case at edmontonjournal.com/videos

to make public are made by the investigative team.

"We realize that the community has a number of questions, which we are attempting to answer through our investigation," he said.

Taniguchi said the news conference was requested by Cote's family, who wanted to make a public appeal for information that may help the case. RCMP did make one specific request: That anyone who was north of Highway 16, between Highway 60 and Highway 44, on the night of Oct. 12 or the early morning of Oct. 13 call RCMP, their local police department or Crime Stoppers.

Cote was the mother of two young children, aged six and four. She was described by those who knew her as a devoted mother and a loving and supportive wife, who was, in turn, loved and adored by her husband, Michael.

"He is devastated," Berg said. Cote's husband was not at Wednesday's news conference.

Both Berg and her other sister, Krista Knapp, said they were not aware of their sister having problems with anybody.

Taniguchi said investigators are "open to all possibilities" in the case, including that more than one person may have been involved in the slaying.

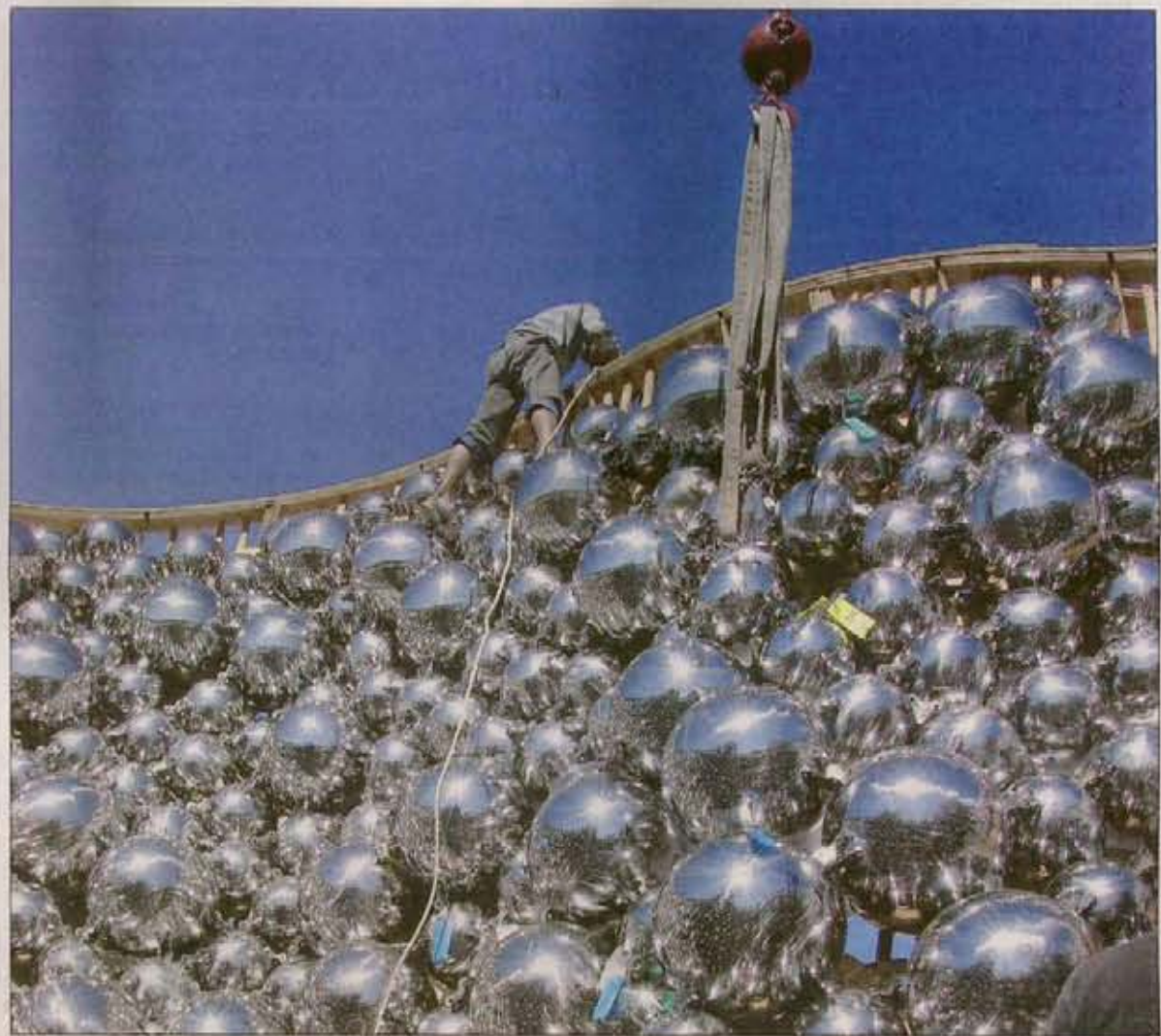
Cote's family has set up a trust fund that may be used as a reward for information that helps solve her slaying. Berg and Knapp said they believe every piece of information could be of assistance.

"Any information, as small as you think it may be, will help," Knapp said. "Solving this case will not get my sister back, but it will bring some peace for our family."

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From left, Rhonda Berg, Jolene Cote's eldest sister; mother Dorothy Commandeur; and youngest sister Krista Knapp issue a public plea for help at RCMP K Division headquarters on Wednesday for information regarding Cote's death on Oct. 13.



Talus Dome, a \$592,000 work featuring 900 spheres, is being built at the corner of Whitemud and Fox Drives. It is Edmonton's latest and biggest piece of permanent public art.

Public art on a grand scale

Talus Dome takes shape on Whitemud Drive

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 EDMONTON

To make public art on an "architectural scale" takes a lot of balls.

Nine hundred and thirty-seven stainless steel spheres, to be precise, fabricated and assembled by Los Angeles-based Ball-Nogues Studio, the design firm responsible for Edmonton's biggest-ever piece of permanent public art. Called Talus Dome, the \$592,500 work is currently being built with a crane, bolts and welding torch in 29 panels at the corner of Whitemud and Fox Drive, just southeast of the Quesnell Bridge. The assembly, which Buenos Aires-born co-designer Gaston Nogues calls the "craziest Lego set you've ever built," should be completed within a couple of weeks. Two more panels clicked into place on Wednesday.

The community of spheres of Talus Dome will stand between five and eight metres high and weighs roughly 2,720 kilograms. It sits on an angle of about 15 degrees, overlooking a new city-ordered lake along Fort Edmonton Park Road. From a distance, the artwork will look like an arsenal of silver snowballs—pity those in the opposing snow fort—and it's already immensely photography friendly up close, each sphere brilliantly reflecting and distorting its surroundings, including human faces, headlights and proximal spheres.

The piece, says co-designer Benjamin Ball from California, was meant to mimic a giant pile of sand or gravel. The name comes from an

earlier incarnation of the project, where it was initially designed to rest within one of the curved support walls along Whitemud, past the northeast side of the bridge. Geologists refer to an accumulation of sand or gravel at the base of a cliff as a talus pile.

Structural concerns, however, meant the piece had to be moved to the other side of the bridge, where it will now be seen daily by even more commuters, those coming up from Fox Drive. "We had to roll with a new concept," Ball notes, "which meant we started to think of it as more articulated, more formally intricate."

Its shape went from precision geology-math to one with more personality. Its major fold, known as the crotch by the construction team, faces upwards toward the major artery of Whitemud Drive. It's here the piece gives you the feeling of dozens of mercurial spider eyes gazing at each other, a fragmented version of Anish Kapoor's giant, reflective bean Cloud Gate in Chicago's Millennium Park, where tourists have spent incalculable hours playing with their warped, funhouse mirror reflections. Edmonton now has its own version, split into hundreds of smooth, weatherproof mirror balls.

Eventually, a ribbon of gravel will surround Talus Dome. Final lighting hasn't been decided. Mother nature may be enough. Talus Dome's designers cite influence from hollow-yet-strong architecture such as Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia. "We were originally thinking an open structure, but decided we should probably discourage teenagers from

nefarious activities," Ball laughs. There is, however, a way to get inside to clean out the inevitable accumulation of coffee cups and cigarette butts.

The spheres were made by different processes depending on their size, but generally underwent hydro formation, where intense water pressure literally crushed top-grade stainless steel into shapes later welded and polished. One by one, these were connected inside a huge plywood structure in L.A., the upside-down cake mould of Talus Dome.

Amazingly, this plywood jimmy went on to become its own public art piece, which Ball-Nogues Studio turned into a temporary swimming pool in the desert outside of Joshua Tree, Calif. For the pool, a local offered salt from his own mine.

"I'd never met anyone who owned their own salt mine," Ball declares. "The piece will just sit there until the desert reclaims it. Until it dies."

Edmonton's will last much longer. The materials are designed to survive decades of weather. Selected by independent jury, Talus Dome is part of a city art program that draws one per cent of the qualifying budget of any publicly accessible municipal project, in this case the Quesnell Bridge widening and rehabilitation, which cost \$161 million since beginning in 2008. The art piece's \$592,500 budget includes fabrication, installation and artist fees and is part of the City of Edmonton's plan to increase livability, attractiveness and to build a civic art collection.

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