

Reminder of World Trade Center coming to Connellsville

By Judy K. Sege | DAILY COURIER
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The Connellsville Area High School Patriots Inc. have been a part of history for seven years.

On Thursday, their board of directors and school district representatives will travel to New York City to bring home a piece of history.

The Patriots will receive a 4-ton piece of steel from the World Trade Center.

A team of community members committed to the Patriots' cause have stepped forward to help, and Patriots board members, city and school officials and both television and print media will travel along to pay witness.

The steel will be incorporated into a renovated war memorial at the high school that will be created as part of future renovations.

CAHS English teacher Linda Shearer founded the CAHS Patriots in March of 2003, after the United States invaded Iraq. The student group raised money and collected snacks and personal items to send to armed forces personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since then, the CAHS Patriots have sent 6,041 packages worth nearly \$300,000 to the war zones. The Patriots will continue to support deployed men and women "until they're all home," Shearer said.

Councilman and Patriot Board Member Greg Ritch will travel to New York. He is an Army veteran and served in Iraq in 2003. "The Patriots sent packages when I was deployed," he said. "They sent 90 packages for me and my men."

"Our mission is to support deployed troops, veterans and those who have given their lives for their country," Shearer said.

Shearer contacted the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey on behalf of the CAHS Patriots more than a year ago.

Steve Coleman, Port Authority spokesman, said the Patriots' proposal was one of more than 1,000. "We received requests from police departments, fire departments. As long as they're displayed publically." He said the authority started advertising the availability of steel last year.

The steel has been stored at Hangar 17 at JFK Airport, where the parts were taken in the days and weeks after Sept. 11, 2001. "There has been a consulting firm tagging the steel for a

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memorial museum. Then we started looking for homes for the rest of them," Coleman said. The authority has received requests from every state and six foreign countries.

In January, Shearer shared the historic news with the school board. "We have been approved for pickup of an artifact from the World Trade Center at 1 p.m. Feb. 10 from JFK Airport. We're taking a bus to the airport and witness the loading of the steel."

The steel carries the serial number I-0029, measures 180 inches by 66 inches by 8 inches and weighs 8,370 pounds.

Although the Patriots do not have to pay for the steel, they had to provide proof of insurance to transport the artifact to Connellsville.

This became a sticking point, because the Patriots did not have the hundreds of thousands of liability coverage necessary.

"John Morrow Jr. of Pleasant Trucking, Connellsville was able to provide documentation of insurance," Shearer said. "Without him and the generosity of his employees, it would not be possible."

The Port Authority accepted Pleasant Trucking's certificate of insurance.

"She contacted us," Pleasant Trucking's owner Morrow said of Shearer, "and it was the right thing to do. John Powers will drive the truck. He's a good driver. He's been with us since 2008. We will transport the steel on a flat-bed."

T.A. Nelson Bus Lines, Dunbar Township, will provide the bus.

Randy Richter felt honored to be asked. "What this group has accomplished, this is a great thing for the area. I wanted to try to do my part for the community, to try to help out."

Once the steel arrives at Connellsville Area High School, All Crane Rental of Pennsylvania will unload it from the truck.

Bob Kelly owns the Elizabeth-based company. "I'm from Connellsville," he said. "I went to high school there. We like to help people in our community who need it. I'm glad to do it."

This will not be the first time Kelly has moved World Trade Center steel.

"Our equipment was there at the World Trade Center for the cleanup. Ours were the two largest cranes on the WTC site. We were there for a year," Kelly said. "One of the crane companies in New York called and we went up to do what we could."

The bus will depart for New York long before dawn and return long after sundown, but Shearer said those who make the long trip, "will return filled with Falcon and American pride."