

World Trade Center treasured artifacts go nationwide

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The Port Authority is on a mission to deliver steel salvaged from the World Trade Center to towns and agencies across the country in time for the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people.



KEVIN R. WEXLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sandy Kornberg and Joey Romaniello Jr. at JFK Airport securing a flag to steel from the Twin Towers heading to Glenville, Conn.

"This is a sacred mission for this agency — to not only rebuild the World Trade Center site, but also make sure that at memorials to 9/11 all across the country, people would be able to, whether in [Bergen County](#), New Jersey, or St. Louis, Mo. ... see what happened that day," said Bill Baroni, the agency's deputy executive director.

The agency has so far fulfilled 1,112 of the 1,500 requests it has received, sending pieces of steel to all 50 states and as far away as China.

The rusted and sometimes mangled pieces of metal are stored at Hangar 17, a cavernous building at John F. Kennedy International Airport, where the Port Authority keeps the

RECORD

Continued

Date: May 20, 2011

salvaged remnants of the Trade Center.

For almost a year, firefighters, police officers and truck drivers have traveled from near and far to Hangar 17. They take away tangible reminders of one of the most tragic days in recent American history. Those reminders end up in large metropolitan areas, such as Dallas-Forth Worth, and small towns, such as Yountville, Calif., a culinary mecca in Napa County.

New Milford, Fort Lee, Wanaque and Fair Lawn are among the 151 New Jersey towns and groups that have received approval for World Trade Center steel, said Steve Coleman, a spokesman for the Port Authority.

Fort Lee is using its girder to build a 9/11 memorial in Constitution Park on Linwood Avenue in time for the anniversary, Mayor Mark Sokolich said.

The memorial will be dedicated to the victims but will recognize the role that each of the borough's emergency services played in responding to the attacks, he said.

"The idea here is that, 25 years from now, when the grandchildren of our first responders go to this memorial, they will know about the OEM [Office of Emergency Management] efforts, and the triage at Fort Lee High School," he said. "They will know about the Police Department policing — and enforcement of law and order — at the George Washington Bridge. They will know about the Fire Department manning and responding to calls in New York City, in firehouses where the guys and the trucks were never returning."

West Milford officials picked up their 18-foot-long relic about four weeks ago, Borough Administrator Kevin Boyle said. The town lost four residents in the attacks, and the Rev. Mychal Judge, a New York City Fire Department chaplain, once served at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church.

New Jersey towns aren't the only communities determined to keep the memory alive.

"This is something tangible, something they can touch and take a photo of, and they can continue to come back as many times as they want," said Cristal Bermudez Nuñez, a spokeswoman for the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in Tampa, Fla. "A lot of people find comfort in being able to touch it. Some of them can't get on a plane and go to Ground Zero."

The Sheriff's Office obtained a 1,471-pound piece of metal in April and displayed it at two malls.

Four survivors attended the viewings, she said, and each one had a story.

There were "so many emotions," she said. "One woman said that could have been the beam that was holding up the stairs that helped [her] to get out. She said it brought back the scenes of the firefighters who were going up the stairs while she was going down, and she knew there was no way that they made it out."

Capt. William Cummins of the Shrewsbury Fire Department in Massachusetts received the 124-pound piece of steel in the mail on March 18. He first applied in September 2009, he said.

The trade center attack "made an impression on all of us at work," he said. "We all wanted to jump on a bus and drive down to New York to help out," he said.

The artifact is stored in the fire headquarters under an American flag.

"One of the men said he got the chills," Cummins said. "We all got the chills when we got it. That's how we feel. We feel a lot closer to what happened that day, and when you can touch it, it makes it real."

On a recent Thursday morning, officials from Hudson, N.H.; Doylestown, Pa.; Napa Valley, Calif.; and Greenwich, Conn., made the trek to Hangar 17.

The team from Hudson left home at 2 a.m. for the 4 1/2-hour drive to New York City to pick up the artifact and return in time for a 5 p.m. ceremony at town hall.

The piece is 23 feet long and weighs 9 tons. The town plans to cut the piece in half to represent the Twin Towers, Fire Capt. Dave Morin said.

After applying for the steel in September 2009, Morin received approval May 1 — the day it was announced that U.S. Navy SEALs had killed Osama Bin Laden, the 9/11 mastermind.

"It made it much better," he said.

To the many who make the journey, the steel is not simply metal.

They touch it and take pictures. They stare. "Amazing," "incredible," "overwhelmed" and "honored," they are often heard to whisper.

Many drape the metal in an American flag, a sign of respect. A Doylestown trucker added an extra touch by using red, white and blue chains to secure the girder to the flatbed trailer.

"It's just not a piece of steel to Americans," Hudson Selectman Roger Coutu said.

"It's a piece of history. For us, it's a monument for all those who lost their lives."

With the 10th anniversary of the attacks less than four months away, demand has begun to exceed the supply, Coleman said.

"They are continuing to come in, but, unfortunately, we don't have enough steel to fulfill requests coming in now," he said.

Among those who were picking up steel last week were men who helped search for survivors in the days after the attacks.

"It's quite unbelievable," said Sandy Kornberg, president of the Glenville, Conn., Volunteer Fire Company, who worked on "the pile" on Sept. 27. "It's very special."

On his way to pick up the 1,633-pound piece of steel from the south tower, memories "of the complete devastation" on that day flooded his mind.

Members of the Mohegan, N.Y., Volunteer Fire Association, who were clad in their dress blues, were escorted to Hangar 17 by a New York City Police Department cruiser.

One member, Dan Mulleady, who draped the flag on the beams as they were placed onto a red pickup truck, was only 8 years old when the Twin Towers collapsed.

Two of the association's units assisted in the city after the attacks. One unit worked in the rescue operation and another provided backup assistance in the Bronx, said Brian Wolert of the Mohegan department.

"This is a reminder," he said. "We will not always be around, but the steel will be."