

# World Trade Center Stair Climb Will Benefit Wounded Veterans



People enter the One World Trade Center building on Monday. The first stair-climb benefit will be held at One World Trade Center in May to raise money for military veterans, two foundations, the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation and the Captain Billy Burke Foundation, formed after the 9/11 attacks announced Monday. AP Photo/Richard Drew

**By Verena Dobnik**

The first stair-climb race at One World Trade Center — the nation's tallest building — will raise money for military veterans struggling with combat-linked disabilities, two foundations formed after the 9/11 attacks announced Monday.

Officials of the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation and the Captain Billy Burke Foundation detailed plans for the athletic event at Burke's firehouse, Engine Company 21 in midtown Manhattan. Burke lost his life on 9/11 along with Firefighter Stephen Siller from Squad 1 in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Proceeds from the May 17 tower climb will support service members who've been catastrophically injured in war and help educate children who've lost a parent. The money also will help build 200 new homes for veterans with the worst disabilities, mostly triple or quadruple amputees. About 40 houses have been completed.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Siller was off-duty when he ran with over 60 pounds of gear through the blocked-off Brooklyn Battery Tunnel to the World Trade Center. "Our foundation couldn't be more honored to be chosen to hold the first stair-climb event at One World Trade Center," said his brother Frank Siller, foundation chairman and CEO.

There's also a "virtual stair climb" — using elevators — for people who want to participate but are unable to handle the stairs.

Participation is limited to the first 1,000 people who register by May 10. They'll all wear computerized chips that will record their finish time. The entry fee is \$100, and there's a \$250 minimum fundraising requirement.

Sept. 11 first responders will lead the way into the building for the climb, which is to the 90th floor — 180 flights of stairs — of the 104-story building.

Burke led firefighters on the day two terrorist-hijacked planes pierced the twin towers.

His brother, Michael Burke, said Monday that even though Billy knew that the south tower had already fallen, he chose to remain behind to rescue two workers, one in a wheelchair.

When the captain was urged to leave, he responded, "'this is my job, this is who I am.' Then he went on and the tower collapsed," said Burke, who stopped talking several times, his voice breaking.

"What he did that day should be inspiration for us to keep going," the foundation board member said.

In May, as climbers reach the higher floors and their knees and backs "are killing them," he said, "just think of the words of Captain William Burke to his men: 'keep going, I'm right behind you.'"