

# World Trade Center beam will be part of Brownsburg 9/11 memorial

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## **Diana Penner**

Jim Miller was 28 and working as operations manager at a lumber company on Sept. 11, 2001.

Growing up, he had wanted to be a police officer, but after a stint in the Army, he was diverted. Now, as he watched with co-workers and millions of fellow Americans as the nation was being attacked, the desire to serve surged back.

Miller would begin a new life.

He would serve his community, and he would be the one who initiated the effort for his community to honor those who died on 9/11 and to teach Brownsburg's young people about the legacy of that day.

In 2005, Miller became a Brownsburg firefighter, honoring brothers who gave their lives trying to rescue civilians on the day of the attacks. He led the effort to bring a section of a beam from New York City's World Trade Center to Brownsburg for a memorial.

A committee now is in place to move that part of the process along -- the goal is to unveil the monument on Sept. 11, 2013 -- and one of its members, Glenn Nulty, is a native New Yorker who helped build the World Trade Center towers. At age 18, he worked as an iron workers' apprentice for a year, beginning in summer of 1969.

Nulty was there at the beginning, and Miller made sure Brownsburg had a chance to honor the towers' end. Both men hope that memorial, possibly to be located in Arbuckle Park, will not just reflect the past but also inspire the future.

The effort to acquire a section of a tower beam began in 2009 as Miller read an email from a firefighters' organization that noted pieces of the World Trade Center towers

would be available to public-safety agencies wanting to create public memorials.

Miller moved quickly to make a request for Brownsburg, but it took a lot of paperwork, court orders and finally, a trip in a pickup with a trailer to fetch the 9-foot section of a building beam. And then came years of planning and negotiating.

For Miller, now 39, the process of acquiring that 1,500-pound piece of the towers, hauling it back from New York draped in a casket-sized American flag and protectively wrapped in a tarp, and storing it reverently under that flag in a bay at the fire department headquarters has been a blend of emotions and tedious logistics.

Sometimes, both at the same time.

He and three fellow firefighters drove to New York in April 2010, picking up Brownsburg's piece of history at a hangar at John F. Kennedy International Airport. It had an official tag and faintly visible writing on the steel that apparently dates back to the late 1960s, when the skyscrapers were puzzled together from countless component parts.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey didn't determine which building each piece of steel came from, and people in Brownsburg have not been able to figure out whether the letters and numbers are enough to discover the location of the beam.

They might be, Nulty said. He recalls that kind of writing on beams as the buildings went up. They were sort of like puzzle locators, letting the construction crews know exactly where a piece was to be placed.

Although Miller had been to New York City twice since the 9/11 attacks, and even though much of this trip with colleagues was about logistics, he still had a visceral reaction -- and a profound connection -- to the relatively small piece destined for Brownsburg.

"I . . . didn't want to touch it," he said of the first time he saw it. He walked around it a bit and looked at it. "I finally laid my hand on it and got to know it."

He counts that moment as one of the most emotional of his life.

Afterward, the four firefighters were allowed into the hangar to get some perspective on the operation. What they saw took their breath away.

Miller took scores of photos, but the building is so large none of the images conveys the vastness, he said. And throughout, in carefully ordered rows and sections and all "toe-tagged," were massive, medium and small steel-beam sections, smashed cars and fire trucks, whole doorways, a subway car, mysterious pieces of decorative metal -- all that was left of the towers, their contents, and whatever survived near the buildings when it fell. There was even a bicycle rack, with unscathed bikes still chained to it, that somehow had ended up in a "void" surrounded by rubble.

As Miller flipped through his photos on a computer, Nulty held in his hand a dozen or so faded color snapshots -- the square kind, probably taken with an Instamatic -- documenting his year on the construction site.

"Wait! Go back to that one!" he said excitedly to Miller. A metal piece of broken building, now officially an "artifact," looked much like a section caught in a corner of one of Nulty's snapshots.

In another was the distinctive jagged outer frame of the buildings as they went up, eerily looking much like it did when they were brought down three decades later.

Nulty -- who moved to the Indianapolis area while with the National Guard in 1987, and to Brownsburg the next year -- acknowledged that when he worked to build the towers, he was just a kid and it was just a job.

But decades later, his perspective changed on his connection to the birth of the buildings that would define the New York skyline until their violent destruction. For years, those snapshots were practically forgotten. Now, they seem part of history.

After 25 years with the National Guard, Nulty retired in 2000 as a recruiter. His years with the military also play into his ties to the 9/11 attacks and to the memorial planned for Brownsburg.

More than a decade after the attacks, Miller still grapples with understanding those events and putting their fallout in context. Sometimes, he's even uncertain about the

memorial. Is it wrong to take a piece of those buildings away and put them on display?

Is it really just a piece of metal and not a monumental symbol?

But he also has visited small memorials that have been created in New York City to employees of one firm or another and visited Ground Zero. He knows the power of those symbols honoring not the attacks, but the people who died in them.

Those who witnessed that day should never forget, Miller says, and the kids -- who weren't even alive on 9/11 -- should learn about the sacrifices.

And that piece of steel can help.

"This is tangible," he said, gently draping the flag back over the beam. "That's what makes the difference that gives others a foundation on which to build."