

# Beams of World Trade Center headed for memorial on canal

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Written by  
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The last time Greg Hess set foot in New York City, his search-and-rescue team spent long days digging under rubble piled six stories high.

They were searching for survivors.

This week, almost a decade since the 2001 terrorist attacks, the Indianapolis firefighter made an emotional return to Ground Zero. It was a trip that capped a yearlong search to ensure that back home, the horrific events of 9/11 never would be forgotten.

Hess, 54, is bringing back some of the wreckage with him -- twin 22-foot steel internal support I-beams from one of the World Trade Center's collapsed towers.

They soon will form the centerpiece of a 9/11 memorial overlooking the Downtown Canal.

On Saturday, Hess and a semitrailer bearing his reverent cargo -- the beams are draped in an American flag -- will cross into Indiana on I-70. After a stop in Richmond, thousands of motorcyclists are expected to join an Indiana State Police escort to an arrival ceremony in Downtown Indianapolis.

In New York, Hess had steeled himself Wednesday for his return visit to Ground Zero. He spent eight days there in 2001 with the Indiana Task Force One search-and-rescue team.

Mostly, Hess said, he marveled at how different the area looks. The steel skeleton of the new One World Trade Center tower, still under construction, reaches more than 60 stories -- on its way to 105.

Nearby, the National September 11 Memorial & Museum is taking shape, with recessed footprints of the Twin Towers in place behind a fence.

So why build a memorial in Indianapolis?

"It's the right thing to do, for the right reasons," Hess said before this week's trip, expressing worry that Americans were becoming complacent a decade later.

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"You know," he continued. "Indiana was one of the first teams to go out there. Sixty-three of us hopped on a bus and went to the site of the worst terrorist attacks on our country."

The city has donated land for the memorial along Ohio Street, next to an Indianapolis fire station and adjacent to the canal. Hess and Crown Hill Cemetery, which has assisted with planning, are raising private donations to pay for the project.

Hess and other backers hope to finish the memorial in time for dedication on the 10th anniversary in September.

Indianapolis' project is among dozens of local memorials that have used structural remains made available by New York authorities.

Hess and his brother, Scott, flew to New York this week, while Sodrel Truck Lines sent a truck and a driver. On Thursday, they picked up the beams at Kennedy International Airport's Hangar 17, an 80,000-square-foot expanse where structural debris from the towers is stored.

The truck, with Greg Hess riding along, also is bringing back smaller pieces reserved for projects in Noblesville and Lebanon.

The donation of city-owned land and city officials' support have drawn protest from a group that advocates for preserving green space along the Canal Walk. Canal Park Advocates' concerns include the memorial's aesthetics and the somber tone it would set on that corner of the canal.

"The public process and the public are ill-served by these attempted political done-deals," said Clarke Kahlo, a spokesman for Canal Park Advocates. "At an absolute minimum, there should be a broad vetting of this proposal."

A rendering of the memorial shows panels behind the vertically set beams that detail the events and words spoken by then-President George W. Bush in a national address on 9/11.

A bronze eagle perched atop one beam will look toward New York City.

"We don't want to make it too artistic," Hess said. "We want (visitors) to understand that this was a horrific day in the history of our country."

His ultimate hope is that Bush will accept an invitation to attend the dedication ceremony.

Hess has recruited support from Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard's office as well as help from other elected officials and companies.

Before the memorial can be built, city planners will review Gibraltar Design's plans to ensure they follow regional center plan guidelines. But so far, the city's Department of Metropolitan Development has resisted Kahlo's call for a public hearing, which isn't required because of the project's small size.

Kahlo noted there already is a simple stone memorial to 9/11 nearby on the Statehouse grounds, laid a year after the attacks.

Keith Norwalk, Crown Hill's president, said the new project will create a more significant marker while leaving much of the small grassy site intact.

"It is definitely a project that is going to be respectful of the green space and the landscape," he said.

Norwalk said \$300,000 is the target for fundraising, which is still under way. The project includes walkways, a pavilion, benches and landscaping. Some money will be set aside for maintenance.

Elsewhere, some memorials have focused on the sacrifice of police officers and firefighters who died in the towers' collapse. But Hess said the Indianapolis memorial will honor all of the nearly 3,000 victims -- in New York, at the Pentagon and in rural Pennsylvania.

Rich and Eileen LoBianco, native New Yorkers who have lived in Indiana for nearly 20 years, said the memorial will cement a connection to home. Two of Eileen's cousins, both New York City firefighters, died in the towers' collapse.

"I worked in Manhattan when the towers were being built," said Eileen LoBianco, 60, Carmel. "It's a very personal feeling."

They plan to join the escort Saturday, on Rich LoBianco's motorcycle.

Hess said the event appeared to be striking a nerve even outside Indiana.

"We have got people coming from as far away as Missouri and Minnesota and South Carolina to be a part of the ride," he said.