

Girder from World Trade Center installed at Firefighters Museum of Southern New Jersey in Galloway Township

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Retired Atlantic City police Officer Bill Pollock still has vivid memories of Christmas 2001, which he spent sifting through the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center as a member of the New Jersey Critical Incident and Stress Management Team.

Watching Sunday's installation of the Firefighters Museum of Southern New Jersey's latest exhibit — a 7-ton steel girder pulled from the wreckage at ground zero — was a visceral reminder of the carnage more than a decade ago.

“When they came up out of the ground, some of them were still glowing red from the fires underground, three months later,” Pollock said. “To drive by this — I’ll be passing by this every day on the way to Wawa — it just seems surreal.”

The girder, about 20 feet long, was donated as part of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's World Trade Center steel program, which has distributed pieces of wreckage to cities and towns throughout the United States and the world.

The installation at the privately owned Firefighters Museum of Southern New Jersey is temporary until the New Jersey Fire Museum, which solicited the donation, finds a home for its Fallen Firefighters Memorial. With no state funding yet for that project, the girder will remain in Galloway Township.

Atlantic County Fire Marshal Harold “Whitey” Swartz, a 30-year veteran of the Pleasantville Fire Department, owns and operates the museum adjacent to his home in Galloway Township. A friend of New Jersey Fire Museum President Bob Burns, Swartz said he jumped at the chance to host the steel until its permanent home can be built.

For Swartz, who spent his childhood hanging out at the local firehouse and his professional life in the Fire Department, the steel is a fitting memorial to the lives of friends and others lost over the years.

“This is my 54th year, a lot of stuff happens, I’ve lost a lot of friends,” he said. “It’s rough

when something like (9/11) happens. This here, it represents us all.”J.F. Kiely Construction donated the use of one of its trucks to haul the girder, which was escorted by State Police to the Atlantic City rest area off the Garden State Parkway. There, the truck was met by members of the civil servant motorcycle group Knights of the Inferno and volunteer fire companies from Galloway Township, Absecon and Port Republic for the final leg of its journey.

About 100 community members stood in silence as the girder was laid on supports outside the museum. Port Republic firefighter Gene Hawn, who was part of the escort, said he choked up during the installation.

“It brought tears to your eyes to think about where that piece of steel was. It’s a great honor to be here,” Hawn said. “It’s a great thing to have it here in Galloway.”