

One World Trade Observatory Opens To Public

By Maria Alvarez

Hundreds lined up Friday to experience and recapture one of New York City's most spectacular panoramic views lost on 9/11, when the Twin Towers were destroyed, that today is found at the One World Trade Center observatory.

In a wave of New York pride and patriotism, the public got its chance to ride the Western Hemisphere's fastest elevator up -- 1,250 feet in 47 seconds -- to the top of the city's reclaimed observation deck. On the elevator visitors get a three-dimensional video history lesson of New York City that echoes with the city's rebirth after the attacks.

At a morning ribbon-cutting ceremony, 20-year NYPD veteran police officer Victor DiPierro, 47, who worked on the pile during the recovery phase after the Sept. 11 attacks said: "It's just a mix of emotions . . . remembering what I experienced as a rescue worker to today, which is a good day for New Yorkers and America. Today we show the world that we are standing tall and that we have this great view again where we can see forever."

One of the first to go to the top was Westbury resident Kevin Lynch, 48, and his 8-year-old son, Alexander. Lynch said riding to the top of One World Trade was a family tradition he wanted to hand down to his son.

"My sister took me to the top of the World Trade Center back in the 1970s and I wanted to share this extraordinary experience with my son and give him a bit of history," said Lynch, who brought with him a 1970s World Trade Center guide map he received when he was a boy.

After the father and son ascended to the top of the Freedom Tower, Lynch's son said: "It felt amazing. It was nice to see Lady Liberty, the boats and the Empire State Building."

"And we got to see Long Island," said his father. "A plane even flew below us and that was real special," said Lynch, who then reflected on 9/11. "The world stopped that day. And right now, I feel that we are back. I wanted to take a moment and recognize how far we have come."

Patrick J. Foye, executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns One World Trade, said the public opening "marks the completion of One World Trade Center. I think there is a sense of pride and closure with the development of this iconic building."

More than 5 million people are expected to visit the observatory, which spans the 100th, 101st and 102nd floors, in its first year. Before ascending to the observatory, visitors get to hear the voices and see the images of ironworkers and laborers who built the glass skyscraper.

"It was fantastic," said John Vermeer of Humboldt, Iowa, who was one of the first in line to reach the top to celebrate his 35th wedding anniversary with his wife, Julie. "It was a perfect day to see forever. It was monumental!"