

World Trade Center Beam Centerpiece Of 9/11 Memorial In Wauconda



By Frank S. Abderholden

A giant steel beam that crashed down 91 floors from the north tower of the World Trade Center on 9/11 will rise again this fall in Wauconda.

Set to be unveiled Sept. 11, 2015, the village's Heroes of Freedom Memorial will be located between the fire and police stations on Main Street.

"Our goal is to create a fitting tribute to 9/11. It means a lot to me to memorialize them," Mayor Frank Bart, a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserves, said. "Our goals are to create a lasting tribute for those who sacrificed so much on Sept. 11, 2001, and their families, and for those who fought the wars that followed, and their families. May we always remember their sacrifices."

The inspiration for the memorial began to form at Wauconda's Memorial Day ceremony last year. That's when Bart met Kirk Morris, a Gurnee father who lost his son Geoffrey in 2004 in Fallujah, Iraq.

"The Wauconda Heroes of Freedom Memorial brings citizen volunteers, businesses, groups, veterans and government together, much as they were in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, and provides a positive focus," Bart said. "Morris' dream has become our dream. He's the guy that inspired this ... he's the leader. We all want to see this succeed."

Bart said the village would not incur any costs for the project.

Concrete has been donated, labor unions have offered their labor, excavating has been donated and the village owns the land. And, Morris contributed the 19-foot beam from the World Trade Center.

"I told the mayor this would be a great spot for the World Trade Center beam I have and he said, 'Talk to me,'" Morris said. "He told me that this would be great for the town."

The beam was trucked for free last summer from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to a local storage facility.

Morris said he was surprised to see the beam still had its original markings from when the tower was constructed. There are large dents and burn scars as well.

"Some of this dark stuff is from heat damage from the fire I was told," Morris said while pointing at the beam. "The forces that needed to happen to bring this down is just baffling."

The Wauconda memorial site will include benches in tribute to the four planes that were hijacked. The beam's cement base will be in the shape of the Pentagon and a larger cement base will be a 24-foot circle that represents the world. Each branch of the Armed Forces will have its military crest around the base. The mayor said he is reaching out to the library district to create a number of historically accurate story boards to go around the memorial.

"Because the attack was on the world," Bart said, citing the fact that the nearly 3,000 people who died came from 90 different countries.

Visitors will approach the memorial facing west and will first see the beam, which will be coated to protect it from the elements. On the western side of the memorial, there will be a 12-foot by 5-foot remembrance wall with a raised planter that will contain soil from the site where the fourth hijacked plane crashed in Shanksville, Penn. Twelve- to 18-inch badges, one for police and one for firefighters, will also be on the wall.

"This beam is reaching towards, as if beseeching the sky, evocative of the prayers of so many that day," Bart said in a statement. "It also stands as a resilient, silent sentinel to remind visitors of the survivors, first responders and the military, who stepped forward to meet the challenge and help others."

The Wauconda Village Board approved the memorial site plan without opposition on Tuesday. For the World Trade Center beam, the board must also accept an Artifact Display Agreement, which specifies the location, design and obligations for repair and maintenance costs.

"This gives us the opportunity to get funding raised," said the mayor, who estimated the cost at a little less than \$81,000. He said 80 percent of the cost is covered by donations.

"I was proud when I signed it," Bart said, "because it's important to remember their sacrifices, the police, fire department and military and their families made."