

A piece of 9/11: World Trade Center beam to be part of Westerville's firefighters memorial

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Westerville firefighter Tom Ullom, with his hand on a beam from the North Tower of the World Trade Center, prays with other firefighters, their families and the workers who transported the beam to Westerville.

Seeing the 4,000-pound mound of twisted, burnt and crumpled steel is one thing.

Touching it, running smooth fingers along its rough surface to get a sense of what it's been through, is quite another.

Investigators used the original markings put on during construction to identify that this 18-foot-long beam, now labeled simply piece C-40, came from the north face of the North Tower of New York's World Trade Center just above where Flight 11 slammed into the building on Sept. 11, 2001.

And now it's in Westerville, soon to become a part of the Westerville Firefighters Memorial at First Responders' Park. The beam, which arrived Wednesday, is in storage until its public unveiling during the city's 9/11 memorial program.

"When you touch it, you can't help but feel those almost 3,000 souls who were lost that day," said Westerville firefighter/paramedic Tom Ullom, who made it his personal, seven-year quest to get this piece of steel to central Ohio.

After slogging through layers of government to acquire the steel through the proper channels, he was finally able to handpick the piece he wanted in April during a visit to a Maryland warehouse where much of the World Trade Center steel has been stored.

This one called to him because it is so badly damaged.

"It stands for all that day wrought," he said. "But it survived, and it calls to mind the good that came from that day, too. All the people that came to someone else's aid, the humanity that was shown."

A spokeswoman for the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey could not immediately say whether this was the first significant piece of steel delivered to an Ohio city, but Ullom said it might be among one of the first in the country acquired through these channels.

Along with a 9-foot-tall bronze sculpture, the beam eventually will anchor First Responders' Park next to the W. Main Street firehouse. The steel was free, and a Columbus company, Hyper Logistics, provided a truck at no charge to deliver it. But the entire project will cost about \$500,000.

The nonprofit Westerville Fire Fighters' Memorial group still needs to raise about \$90,000 to complete the work.

Ullom said it will all be worth it.

"When you see the damage to that piece, it's extraordinary," he said. "It will be a constant reminder of the one moment that changed everyone's lives."

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