

9/11 ANNIVERSARY

Twin Towers steel to anchor Westerville's memorial plan

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BY DEAN NARCISO

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH



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This mock-up is for a bronze sculpture depicting a fallen Westerville firefighter. It's for a memorial to first responders championed by Tom Ullom, left.

For seven years, Tom Ullom made monthly calls to the guardians of the twisted steel I-beams and chunks of debris that once were the World Trade Center.

"I've been hounding them," said Ullom, a Westerville firefighter and paramedic who has been calling the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

His persistence has paid off.

He learned recently that he will be getting a chunk of the wreckage to be installed in a memorial to first responders in what is now the parking lot of Westerville's E. Main Street firehouse.

He hopes to get construction started soon.

Part of the memorial will include a 9-foot-tall bronze sculpture, *The Crossing*. It depicts Westerville firefighter Dave Theisen, who perished 10 1/2 years ago at 29, helping out at an early-morning fire in Crooksville.

Ullom wants Theisen's widow, Tina, who is battling cancer, to help break ground for the memorial, possibly this month.

"I told her she needs to get better so that she can do that first round of shoveling," he said. "She said that she definitely wanted to be there."

The Port Authority told Ullom that Westerville will be the first city to receive steel from the towers, an announcement he will make today at the city's annual Sept. 11 ceremony at the station.

The Port Authority has been warehousing artifacts such as steel I-beams, twisted turnstiles and cash registers that were buried seven years ago this morning after terrorists destroyed the Twin Towers with two commercial airliners.

Ullom hopes for a 16-foot-long steel I-beam, preferably something twisted, he said.

Port Authority spokesman Steve Coleman said the World Trade Center Memorial in New York will have first dibs on the artifacts for its museum.

"He's apparently getting a piece of steel, but I can't say when," Coleman said.

Before the Port Authority took over the ground-zero site in June 2002, much of the debris was removed to landfills; many rescuers and visitors kept their own mementos.

Steel from the structures has been tested for defects and to determine how the towers collapsed.

The Port Authority hired architects and other experts to evaluate which pieces might be historically significant. Those have been kept in the 80,000-square-foot Hangar 17 at JFK International Airport.

"A lot of these items were what these trained architects thought would have a useful purpose in telling the 9/11 story," Coleman said.

Ullom said the beam probably will be installed on-end outside the Westerville station, next to a timeline of events leading up to the disaster that morning.

"We look at this as being a huge educational piece," he said.

Already, the nonprofit Westerville Fire Fighters' Memorial has raised \$228,000 toward the expected \$500,000 project, including a \$125,000 Ohio Cultural Arts Commission grant. Several businesses have promised to donate labor and materials such as gravel, sand and stone.

"I look at this project as a place for healing to reflect on accomplishments and losses," Ullom said.

dnarciso@dispatch.com