

SEPT. 11 MEMORIAL

City will use World Trade Center steel

Wednesday, September 17, 2008 11:59 AM

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BY ADAM CAIRNS/THISWEEK

Westerville Police Cpl. Douglas Stephens salutes the American flag during a Sept. 11 memorial ceremony at Westerville Fire Station 111.



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Members of the Westerville Fire Department listen to the national anthem.

Westerville soon will have its own piece of Sept. 11 to install in a planned memorial park.

For the past six years, firefighter and medic Tom Ullom, founder of the Westerville Fire Fighters' Memorial, has worked to get a piece of the fallen World Trade Center towers to Westerville.

Ullom announced at Westerville's Sept. 11 memorial service that he had succeeded, and the steel will be placed in the memorial park that is planned for the space east of Fire Station 111, 400 W. Main St.

Ullom said he began inquiring about getting a piece of the towers about a year after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and finally made progress through the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, with the help of U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi's office.

"Once a month, I would call just to let them know I was really serious about that effort, and I think it will pay off," Ullom said.

Plans are to place the steel in the firefighters' memorial park, Ullom said, near a statue of former Westerville firefighter David Thiesen, who was killed while serving as a volunteer with Crooksville's fire department in 2002.

Ullom said he would like to see the World Trade Center steel used not only as a memorial, but as an educational opportunity, with plaques placed in the park near the memorial.

Having a piece of the World Trade Center in the memorial park makes sense, he said, because the Sept. 11 attacks are something people relate to first-responders and everyday heroes.

"For the first-responders of our country, it just brings it all together," he said. "The steel, that's just something we can all relate to."

Ullom said he has not been given a date for the delivery of the steel, but his hope is that it comes while the weather is relatively warm, so Westerville's police and fire departments can have a ceremony to escort it into town.

There are a lot of unanswered questions surrounding the steel, Ullom said, because Westerville will be the first community to get a piece of the World Trade Center from the port authority.

"They want to make sure their i's are dotted and their t's are crossed," he said.

Ullom has requested a piece of twisted steel, but he's not sure what will arrive in Westerville.

"We just know we've got a site planned for it," he said.

Money still is being raised for the memorial park, and \$150,000 is needed to complete the sculpture of Thiesen. Memorial organizers would like to see the park completed by November 2010, the 150th anniversary of the Westerville Fire Department, Ullom said.

Fundraising efforts for the park were set to begin in 2001 as a memorial to Thiesen. The plans changed following the Sept. 11 attacks, Ullom said, when organizers began raising money for a memorial that would honor the victims of the attacks as well.

"It's something that impacted everyone in the United States," Ullom said. "It wasn't just a community thing. It impacted everyone so immensely."

With years now put into planning the memorial, he said his efforts, and the efforts of the other organizers, will prove worthwhile.

"It's been a pretty long journey, but hopefully, in the end, it will all be worth it," he said.

Those interested in the fundraising efforts can visit the Westerville Fire Fighters' Memorial Web site, www.wffmemorial.org, or call Ullom at (614) 736-4323.

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