

# Mission: 343 to honor fallen 9/11 firefighters



Written by

**Patti Singer**  
Staff writer

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Just a few flags in front of the gazebo at Ontario Beach Park were enough to stir emotions.

"I got choked up a couple of times," said Bob Nevis, who watched Sunday's preview of the Mission: 343 Field of Honor memorial for firefighters who died at Ground Zero.

On Sept. 6, volunteers will place 343 flags, one for each firefighter who died at the World Trade Center after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The flags will stand day and night through Sept. 11, and each will bear the name of a firefighter who perished at the towers.

"We can't forget about what happened," said Nevis of Greece, whose family was a few feet away and setting up a birthday party for his 2-year-old grandson.

"It's something that's got to be remembered," said the 68-year-old Air

Force veteran of the Vietnam War. "Putting it forward in this way is a good thing."

Mission: 343 is being organized by Operation Patriot Foundation, which was founded after the attacks and pays tribute to firefighters, law enforcement, first responders and active and retired military personnel. The nonprofit group raises money to support organizations that assist them, and it is offering \$50 sponsorships for each flag to benefit the Finger Lakes Burn Association.

At the conclusion of the memorial on Sept. 11, each flag will be given to its sponsor and the proceeds will go to FLBA programs for firefighters injured in the line of duty.

"It's hard to know what will be from a fundraising standpoint," said executive director Paul Schwartzman. The organization, which serves children through adults and each summer hosts a camp for kids, has an annual budget of about \$50,000.

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"We're a small nonprofit," he said. "Anything will be meaningful."

Schwartzman learned when he arrived for Sunday's event that he would be among four people to symbolically place one of the 3-foot-by-5-foot flags.

"When they handed me the flag and I got to place it, it made it very real. It was more touching than I thought it would be."

The flags were taken down after Sunday's event and the full complement will be reinstalled on Sept. 6. Volunteers from Time Warner Cable's Vetnet, employees who are veterans of the armed services, and members of the Patriot Guard Riders, which was invited to Sunday's event, will assist.

Once in place, the flags will stand about 10 feet apart and will fill the lawn from the carousel to the picnic shelters.

"The public is invited to walk through the healing field to reflect on the heroism of these brave souls and gain greater appreciation of the sacrifice they made that day," said County Executive Maggie Brooks.

"Firefighters are trained to see flames and run toward them," she said. "But one can only imagine the task before the 343 brave souls serving the fire department of New York City arriving at what we know today as Ground Zero. They gave their lives that day so that others would survive."

[PSINGER@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:PSINGER@DemocratandChronicle.com)

**For more**

For information about sponsoring a flag go to [www.mission343.org](http://www.mission343.org)

For information about Operation Patriot Foundation, go to [www.operationpatriot.org](http://www.operationpatriot.org).

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