

Healing Field honors victims of 9/11

By Allison Hurtado, Ahwatukee Foothills News | Posted: Tuesday, September 6, 2011 8:00 am

Organizing and helping put up close to 3,000 American flags at Tempe Beach Park each year around Sept. 11 is a daunting task, but it's one Ahwatukee Foothills resident Mark Poisson does happily. His inspiration is the response from visitors each year who come to visit the Healing Fields.

"I got involved about three years ago as a volunteer to help set up," Poisson said. "I heard they needed volunteers. Once I did it once, and it is extremely hard work, and I saw the power of what it did for people as they walk through, I knew it was something I wanted to be involved with."

Poisson is part of the Tempe Exchange Club, a community service organization that organizes the Healing Field each year. Last year, Poisson was a chairperson for the event but this year he is handling some of the subcommittees.

The Healing Field is a display of 2,996 American flags with a yellow ribbon to honor each person who died in the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Each flag also contains a small biography about the person it represents.

"The first year I got involved I helped a couple people who came to our booth in the park and told me they had a loved one perish and they were looking for that specific card," Poisson said. "The emotion that loved ones have when they see that card, and the appreciation they have for us, you just have to see that once and you'll understand why we keep doing this."

Last year, Tempe Exchange estimates they had about 10,000 visitors but because this year is the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 they expect nearly double that will visit the display at some point.

In past years the group held a memorial service on the morning of Sept. 11 and a candle-light vigil in the evening. This year, the group plans to have volunteers read the names of all the victims during the morning memorial service.

There will also be a patriotic concert on Saturday, Sept. 10 featuring local high school choirs who have volunteered to come sing.

Poisson will be helping set up the flags on Friday, Sept. 9 at 6 a.m. They expect about 150 volunteers to come and help and they hope to be done with most of the set-up by 10 a.m. The flags will remain up until Monday, Sept. 12.

"I think we should never forget," Poisson said. "We should never forget what happened 9-11-2001. I feel the country is losing a little bit of the impact we all felt that day when we were watching the news. Reason No. 1 for doing this is to never forget.

Reason No. 2 is to allow the people and the country to heal. They walk through that Healing Field and people begin to heal a little bit more. They see that they are not alone in their grief. They're seeing that there are people out here in the country willing to sacrifice their time to honor those people who died."

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