

9/11: 'Healing Field' in Tempe spurs recovery, reflection

by **Larry Rodgers** - Sept. 7, 2011 11:16 AM
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The 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania is triggering an array of emotions, from grief over the huge loss of life to renewed commitment to loved ones in the aftermath to pride in how America has rebounded.

Healing Field

When: 5 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday-Sunday, Sept. 9-11. The names of 9/11 victims will be read starting at 7:15 a.m. Sunday. Candlelight vigil starts at 7 p.m. Sunday. Blood drive runs 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Where: Tempe Beach Park, Mill Avenue and Rio Salado Parkway, Tempe.

Admission: Free. Donations accepted.

Details: 480-967-2001, tempe.gov

In Tempe, the focus will be on healing.

For the eighth year, a Healing Field will be set up at Tempe Beach Park, featuring 3,000 full-size American flags and placards with information on each victim of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. A "heroes banner," carrying the names of first responders who gave their lives that day also will be on display.

"For our generation, this event was as significant as Pearl Harbor," said Michael Whitaker, president of the Southwest District Exchange Clubs, which perform service projects in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

"Unlike a cemetery, which can be kind of cold, our display has 8-foot poles with flags that fly in your face. We grid the field in 5-foot squares so you can touch two lives (through flags) at a time."

The decade anniversary of the horrific loss could hit some people especially hard, and Whitaker is glad that his group, in partnership with Tempe, can offer a space for consolation and reflection.

"With the 10th anniversary," Whitaker said, "and also because we have killed Osama Bin

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Laden, we feel there is a certain closure. There may be more healing going on in the field than in previous years."

The field will be open to the public free of charge Friday through Sunday. Donations will be accepted, with proceeds funding programs to battle child abuse, which Whitaker said his group considers "terrorism against families."

Those who would like to volunteer to set up the flags, which were bought for the city through private donations, should assemble at 6 a.m. Friday at the park, which is on the southern shore of Tempe Town Lake.

About 10,000 people visit the field annually, and the event has raised about \$50,000, Whitaker said.

Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman said the purpose of the Healing Field is twofold: "We hope to proudly honor those who lost their lives in the attacks and those who have lost their lives since while protecting our freedom."

Hallman said he is continually impressed by the dedication and professionalism of those who work in an array of agencies to prevent another attack on America.

"The most stunning testament to the work of our armed forces and police personnel is that they have to be perfect," he said. "To achieve 10 years without another (major) attack is a testament to that kind of commitment."

Flagpoles on the outer edge of the Healing Field will hold yellow ribbons honoring the firefighters who died in New York City, and pairs of combat boots will sit at the base of flags honoring veterans who died on that

fateful day in 2001. Six stuffed bears recall the children who were killed.

New this year will be 35 sky-blue ribbons on the flags honoring members of the air crews who died in the three planes hijacked by terrorists on Sept. 11.

Whitaker said, "We find notes left on flagpoles, flowers at the bases, all types of memorabilia. A lot of people walk through the entire field."

Those who are especially touched may purchase a flag and pole for \$30. Those flags will be replaced on the field by some kept as spares.

United Blood Services will be on hand Saturday and Sunday to collect blood for Valley hospitals. Those who donate will receive a red ribbon that they may attach to a flagpole in the Healing Field.

At 5:56 a.m. Sunday, (coinciding with the time that the 9/11 attacks began) a brief ceremony will include a reading of the names of first responders who perished. Later in the morning and into the afternoon the names of all 9/11 victims will be read.

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Members of the public are invited to help read the victims' names.

A candlelight vigil will be staged at 7 p.m. Ellie Lobel, a New York data-base engineer who escaped the lobby of the South Tower of the World Trade Center in New York during the attacks, will speak at that event.

"At the end of the candlelight vigil, everyone walks out on the field," Whitaker said. "Then they sing 'Amazing Grace.' It kind of sends shivers up your spine."

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