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Cemetery to host Sept. 11 tribute

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The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- The Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District is preparing to honor the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in a big way.

Spring Hill Cemetery will host a Healing Field 9/11 flag memorial from Sept. 5 to Sept. 11. The memorial will feature 3,000 American flags. Each will be 3-by-5-feet in size and stand in perfect rows 8 feet off the ground.

Kevin Brady, the park district's director, said the flag display will join a new, 550-pound brass bell at the cemetery. Together the bell and flags will highlight a weeklong celebration.

"We hope that this will be one of the largest, most powerful community events that Huntington has ever seen," he said.

Brady said the weeklong memorial service will include a variety of events. It will honor veterans and victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people, including local native Paul D. Ambrose who died as a hijacked plane crashed into the Pentagon.

Ambrose's parents will participate in this September's ceremony and ring the bell for its first time.

The Healing Field website states the "living display of heroism will fly as a temporary patriotic tribute to the strength and unity of Americans."

Brady, who struggles to contain his enthusiasm, admits such an undertaking will require community support in the form of individual and corporate sponsorships.

Each flag-and-pole combination will cost \$30. Multiply that by 3,000 flags and the Park District ends up needing \$90,000.

Another \$75,000 will be required for the bell and its casting. That brings the total bill to \$165,000. Brady's ultimate goal is to collect \$200,000 in sponsorships. He pledged to set aside the balance for the building of a bell tower at the cemetery, which he hopes to start construction soon after the Healing Field concludes.

The Park District paid \$5,000 to secure the chance to host West Virginia's first Healing Field memorial. Brady said that makes Huntington one of 138 cities hosting such a tribute.

Brady credited cemetery staff with pushing the idea. He believes it fits such a cemetery as Spring Hill due to Ambroses' legacy and the presence of the Marshall University plane crash memorial. Victims of the 1970 plane crash also will be honored in ceremonies set for the Healing Field.