



West Michigan Healing Field memorial to remember those who died in Sept. 11 terrorist attacks

Published: Friday, August 19, 2011, 10:12 AM Updated: Saturday, August 20, 2011, 12:46 PM

As the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11 approaches, area residents can be a part of a local memorial to remember the lives who were lost that day.

The West Michigan Healing Field memorial will serve as a visual reminder of those who died in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks with 3,200 U.S. flags representing each of the victims on display on three acres at the Cannonsburg Ski Area in Rockford. The healing field is one of only 16 across the nation to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the tragedy.



Nancy Martin, vice president of United Bank, stands with flags that will be on display in the West Michigan Healing Field to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11. Area residents can visit any local United Bank branch to sponsor a flag.

"These 3,200 American flags will be an incredible visual memorial, making sure we never forget those victims or the support of our local safety personnel and military that put our safety ahead of their own every day," said Steve Gerencer, volunteer chairman of West Michigan Healing Field.

Each flag will have a 4- by 5-inch tag with the biography of one of the victims, such as Diane Simmons, a Virginia resident who was on American Airlines Flight 77 on her way to Hawaii to spread her father's ashes alongside her mother's, and firefighter Robert Curatolo, who went off duty at 9 a.m. but hitched a ride to the World Trade Center Towers after they were hit. Curatolo was last seen dragging a man with two broken legs to safety and then entering the second building.

Area residents can sponsor a flag with the victim's biography for \$75 if the flag is picked up after the event or \$80 to have the flag shipped to their home. Sue Bodenner, who serves as chairwoman for the West Michigan Healing Field, said more than \$100,000 will be raised for local first responder units if all the flags are sponsored. She said the flags aim to draw visitors through the healing field to read each of the victim's stories. She said the sponsorship also allows the victim's memory to stay alive year-round as the flag goes home with the sponsor after the event.

"If you think about all these flags in one location, it's one feeling," Bodenner said. "If you sponsor a flag and take it to your home, it's another feeling—you remember that person. That's what families of the victims want, they don't want us to forget."

Bodenner said more than 400 volunteers also are needed for the memorial. Volunteers are needed for parking lot teams, flag assemblers, flag carries for the opening ceremony, and more.

The West Michigan Healing Field is a free event open 24 hours a day from noon Sept. 9 to 3 p.m. Sept. 13 with special memorial services and ceremonies held during those days. To sponsor a flag, visit www.healingfield.org/west-michigan-2011 or visit any local United Bank Branch. To volunteer, contact Gerencer at 293-9194. For more information on the healing field, call Bodenner at 866-2002.