

...by the dawn's early light From daybreak and into the dark, The Exchange Club's flags inspired us all

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Newburyport photographer Peter Zoltai captured this image of the Field of Honor at the dawn's early light

Newburyport — The flags stood in the Exchange Club of Newburyport's Field of Honor. They waved in the breeze that blew across the Bartlett Mall.

"It's a living display," said Exchange Club President Kathleen Bailey. "When a flag touches you, you feel like that person who the flag is honoring touches your life right that second."

It was Bailey's idea last year to set up flags in honor of our country's heroes around the anniversary of the terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001. "Last year it was somewhat successful," she recalled. "And now, this year, it is an awesome way to honor," she added.

The display of large flags is an eye-catching attention getter. As Marilyn Flaherty of Newburyport put it, "I was walking this way and it drew my attention. I think it's a wonderful way to reflect on all the lives that were lost."

What we should tell the kids

Erin Dunphy, also of Newburyport, said she and her family were strolling through the Filed of Honor because, "our children wanted to know all about it." She said she and her husband Mike agree that it is a parent's task to inform children gently about the attacks. "I told them," she said, "that 10 years ago there was a very sad day in American history. An office building in New York City was attacked and a lot of innocent people died.' It's beyond their comprehension," she said. "It's beyond anyone's comprehension, isn't it?"

Witness to tragedy

Ryan Sheedy, 13, of Rowley was not as fortunate as the Dunphy children. Instead of hearing about the tragedy a decade later without the graphic television footage, he was just three years old when he saw the attacks live on television.

“It is one of my first memories,” he said, as he solemnly fingered a flag label honoring “The First Responders.”

“I remember there was a lady holding her shoes in her hands, and lots of smoke coming out of the tower. I was really confused,” Sheedy said. “I was scared, especially by the second plane.”

The memory of the scene itself is so intense for him that he cannot remember which adults he was with at the time. Perhaps a parent, perhaps a daycare provider. “I just remember people crying,” he said. “I just think it’s so great that people are willing to put up all these flags,” he said, looking around the sea of flags that surrounded him.

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