

## Healing Fields 9/11 memorial coming to Rockford

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### Event to represent all of West Michigan

by **BETH ALTENA**



Photo provided by COLONIAL FLAG FOUNDATION

“It’s going to be a big project and really exciting,” said Sawn Swensen, program director for the Healing Fields of Colonial Flag Foundation, who is working with Rockford Area Community Endowment (RACE) to bring Healing Fields to Rockford.

The memorial event in honor of those who lost their lives in the September 11 attacks one decade ago will take place at Cannonsburg Ski Lodge. It will feature an American Flag in the names of each individual who died in the terrorist attacks. The displays, which have been held annually around the country since 2002—the first anniversary of the terrorist attack that killed over 3,000—are stunning and very moving exhibits.

The board members of RACE—who represent participating communities in the endowment—the City of Rockford, and the townships of Cannon, Courtland, Algoma and Plainfield met Tuesday, April 12 at Rockford City Hall to discuss the project and other business.

Mary Ann Anderson, the Courtland Township RACE representative, said interest has been high in the project, and an introductory meeting was well attended with people from many organizations expressing interest in participating. With sponsorship, both corporate and small business, RACE plans to cover the costs of the Healing Fields and have additional revenue be shared by nonprofit groups from across West Michigan.

RACE members settled on \$75 as the cost of each of the 3,200 flags. Organizations who are planning a 9/11 memorial are asked to consider having them at the Healing Fields, including area American Legion groups. The Healing Fields has a Facebook page with videos and photos. RACE supports the Rockford community in the form of grants to area groups and nonprofits. It was founded years ago as a requirement for funding the building of the Towers and the North Rockford Middle School pool. The late Clarence Blakeslee was one of the organization's founding members. Dormant for a long time, the foundation was revitalized within the past years and has built up its endowment to nearly \$100,000.

Anderson said during the meeting, "It is worth noting that briefly we were over \$100,000." Life membership in RACE is just \$25, and among RACE fundraisers are the sale of bricks in Recognition Plaza at the dam in downtown Rockford. Currently the RACE board is lacking a member from Algoma Township and would welcome inquiries from Algoma residents about joining the board.

A major RACE event is the annual recognition of residents of historic or other major significance to the area, which will take place at the plaza on Tuesday, May 24. This year the Courtland Township nominee, the late Paul Robe, will be honored as will Homer Burch of Rockford.

More information about RACE can be found on the City of Rockford website at [www.rockford.mi.us/pages/endowment.html](http://www.rockford.mi.us/pages/endowment.html).

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