

Utah sculptor memorializes hope in 9/11 tribute

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KEARNS — Beyond the bone and sinew and the firemen's turnout gear, Stan Watts takes bronze and sculpts the intangibles he sees — awe, sorrow, grief and reverence.

With his 9/11 sculpture to be unveiled at the 10th annual Utah Healing Field Memorial, Watts' tribute to the tragedy does not speak to the despair of what was lost that fateful September day, but rather to the hope of what can be, and what is.



"It reminds us of what we have gone through since 9/11 and that we still have hope for this nation — and it is something we need," Watts said. "Hope is something that helps us look forward to tomorrow and a better day."

It is that sentiment the artist desires the public to hold close when the memorial, "Hope Rising — To Lift a Nation," makes its debut in front of the Sandy City Offices at 11 a.m. Saturday as part of a multiday tribute to 9/11's victims, and to the country.

Watts' work is inspired by the photo taken by Thomas E. Franklin and published in *The Record*, a New Jersey paper, in the aftermath of the attacks. The photo shows three firemen who spontaneously raised the American flag amid the wreckage of the crumbled twin towers after terrorists crashed two commercial jets into the buildings on Sept. 11, 2001.

It has since, for many, become an indelible symbol of the American flag rising from the ashes of destruction at ground zero, a pictorial of sorts of an unbroken America even in the weight of such horrific events.

That's the way Watts sees it, anyhow, not as a testament to a particular group, creed or professional affinity.

"The image is about the flag and what it means to our country," he said. "If you think about 9/11 and how many were lost, and how many of our guys were lost going off to war — they all sacrifice for our flag. We'll always have a soft spot in our heart for the flag, whether it is in the classroom, the battlefield at Iwo Jima or at the twin towers. The flag sings the same song."

It wasn't an easy feat for Watts — a Utah artist who has pursued his passion full time since 1994 — to secure the rights to create the memorial. When permission finally came in June of this year, Watts was up against a stringent and unforgiving deadline.

In the dust of his own shop, after long days and longer nights, the memorial of three 9-foot tall, 800-pound firefighters rose and will find its permanent home in Sandy.

It will stand at the Utah Healing Field amid 3,000 flags that represent 9/11 victims, a vision pushed by Paul Swenson, president of Colonial Flag and founder of the Healing Field Foundation.

Swenson has long sought such a permanent tribute, and like Watts, he wants the message to be one of hope and resilience, not of destruction and horror.

To both men, it is an image America could cling to in the immediacy of the attack as its magnitude sunk in, but is also one that can carry a nation forward.

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<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/705390487/Utah-sculptor-memorializes-hope-in-9/15/2011>

"It was such a life changing event," Watts said. "But when you think about all the images, when you think about this one, it was good that came in that image. It reminded us of who we were — it kind of hit us in the heart."

2011 Utah Healing Field Schedule:

Thursday — All day — Healing Field flag display, tribute display, field trips

Friday — All day — Flag display, tribute display, emergency vehicle display, field trips

Saturday — All day — Flag display, tribute display, emergency vehicle display, military apparatus display; fire ride bicycle ride begins at South Valley Harley at 10 a.m.; Hope Rising

Monument unveiled, program, 11 a.m.

Sunday — All day - Flag display, tribute display; reading of victims' names at 4:30 p.m.

Monday — All day — Flag display, tribute display, field trips; emergency vehicle display at 4 p.m.

Tuesday — All day — Flag display, tribute display; field trips.

Those wishing to donate to the Utah Healing Field Display may visit healingfield.org/Utah and purchase flags in the display. Each flag will include a name of a victim, short bio and ribbon.

E-mail: amyjoi@desnews.com

Twitter: [amyjoi16](https://twitter.com/amyjoi16)

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