Senator Clinton Visits

Marian Fontana

I still find it difficult to look at Ground Zero without getting emotional; however, the window in our office overlooking the site seemed like a fitting place to start our meeting with the Senator on March 6th. Our loved ones were in the forefront of Vice President Lee Ielpi's mind as he pointed out to the Senator where his son Jonathan was found, emphasizing the painful reality that over, forty percent of the families have received nothing of their loved ones remains.

We noted to the Senator that, except for a tall fence with a few signs, the site no longer bears any trace of the tragedy that took place there over three and a half years ago. She nodded, watching twenty floors below as tour buses unloaded people from all over the country and the world hoping to take home some sense of what happened that day.

Lee explained that this was the impetus to open the Tribute Center. He pointed to the Tribute Center’s home on Liberty Street that will serve as a temporary visitors center until the permanent memorial is built. We emphasized our commitment to ensuring that the people who visit here will not only learn of the tragedy through the exhibits offered, but through the family members, residents, volunteers and rescue workers who will serve as guides. People will leave our Center with an intimate understanding of 9/11 and how this event and losing our loved ones changed our lives forever— the true story of 9/11.

The Senator offered her support and was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the Tribute Center. She emphasized that the material included in the exhibit should be handled with the utmost reverence and respect, to which we agreed. While we noted that our group was a non-partisan organization beholden to none, we were grateful that the Senator shared our commitment to creating a place to reflect on the events of 9/11.

Now, with the Freedom Tower plans stalled and so many families disappointed with the slow process of memorialization, the importance of the Tribute Center seems evermore paramount. The family members’ input and the commitment of so many like the Senator, strengthens our resolve to create a place that will not only emphasize this tragedy, but will serve as a testament to the resilience of our nation, the city and most of all, the human spirit. We thank the Senator for taking time out of her busy schedule to offer the families, once again, her support.

Healing Bridges

Jennifer Adams

In July, 2004, Mrs. Shizue Takahashi, who lost her husband in the March 20, 1995 sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway, visited New York to learn about victims’ rights in the United States. Upon her return, Mrs. Takahashi sponsored representatives from the September 11th Families’ Association to attend a symposium in Japan on the sarin gas attack. Ten years after the attack, 12 families continue to grieve the loss of their loved ones. Over 5,000 survivors continue to deal with varying physical and psychological effects. Families and survivors have yet to receive any support or compensation from the Japanese government. Mrs. Takahashi is founder and president of the Tokyo Subway Sarin Incident Victims Association which advocates for victims of the attack.

On March 19, 2005, the Tokyo Subway Sarin Incident Victims Association and the Tokyo Bar Association sponsored a symposium to update families, survivors and the public about continued health effects and victim rights. At the symposium, Lee Ielpi delivered a letter of support from Mayor Bloomberg that stated in part, “the global community must stand united in our efforts to protect and provide assistance to our citizens.” The Tokyo Subway Sarin Incident Victims Association reported on survivors living with varying degrees of paralysis from sarin exposure and post-traumatic stress. Representatives of the September 11th Families’ Association delivered an educational presentation about the September 11th relief efforts and US government support.

Survivor Yuli Kim, whose sister was hospitalized after exposure to sarin, explained how survivors continue to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and physical limitations. “I am one of very few people who speak out about the attack and its impact. I feel it is important to remember, and for victims to be supported.” Suzuki, a psychologist and professor of criminal victimology in Japan, says, “Victim rights are not traditionally acknowledged in Japanese culture. The understanding we now have of the importance of support in response to terrorism will help Japan shape policies for the future.” Mrs. Takahashi extended her sincere appreciation for attendance of the September 11th Families’ Association in a statement at the Foreign Press Club and at Japan’s House of Representatives. “Understanding how the US supports victims of terrorism and crime provides a model for Japan.”

While in Japan, Association representatives met with families of September 11th victims. Twenty-six Japanese citizens died on 9/11. Japanese families have had difficulty in receiving and understanding September 11th-related information. Many families have traveled to the World Trade Center site for the anniversaries. They expressed confusion in recognizing their loved ones’ names at the site. While families have been able to learn what their loved ones’ names look like in English, Japanese friends and relatives are unable to find the names, since they are not in Japanese characters. Lee Ielpi brought this concern to the attention of the LMDC Family Advisory Council that represents the interests of families in developing the WTC memorial.

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Senator Clinton visits the September 11th Families’ Association to learn about the Tribute Center.
Week of Hope
Elia Zedeño

Recently, I returned home from a week spent in Oklahoma City. For a survivor of the February 26, 1993 bombing and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center, it was both an honor and a privilege to share time and words of comfort during Oklahoma City's "Week of Hope."

Through the World Trade Center Survivors' Network, I have made friends with some who survived the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995. During my stay in Oklahoma City, Richard Williams, who survived the bombing at the Murrah Federal Building, was my personal guide. Mr. Williams has been instrumental in the creation of the National Memorial and the National Memorial Museum in Oklahoma City.

This past week was Oklahoma City’s 10th Anniversary; and the National Memorial sponsored many events beginning with a Candlelight Vigil and culminating in the 5th Annual Memorial Marathon, in which close to 12,000 participated. In addition, during the "Week of Hope," many organizations and institutions throughout the City took part in the week's events. I was witness to such contributions as a presentation by Holocaust survivor and writer, Elie Wiesel, and the 1st Annual Model UN Council presented by 15 high schools throughout the state, at Oklahoma City University.

As Richard Williams explained the symbolism behind everything at the Memorial, and pointed to park rangers providing guided tours to visitors, I understood more than ever the importance of building the Tribute Center near our Ground Zero, as well as the necessity for our input as survivors in volunteering as tour guides.

Finally, I came face to face with the "Survivor Tree." There was nothing for me to do except feel humble as I took note of the scars he still wears shamelessly and guiltlessly. In defiance he stands with a tremendous will to survive, knowing all he needs is the Grace of God to suffice him.

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The September 11th Families Association visits Japan to support international healing and understand 9/11 families' concerns.

Barbara Horn, Shizue Takahashi, Lee Ielpi and Jennifer Adams in front of the Sarin Gas Memorial Plaque, the only recognition of the event, in Tokyo, Japan.

Standing in front of the memorial in Hiroshima, Japan: Mr. & Mrs. Sumiyama, who lost their son Yoichi Sumiyama on 9/11, Lee Ielpi, who lost his son Jonathan Ielpi on 9/11, and Mr. Ito, who lost his son Kazushige Ito on 9/11 and lived in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped.

Jennifer Adams, Barbara Horn and Lee Ielpi meet with Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Staff.

Representatives from the September 11th Families’ Association meet with Mr. and Mrs. Kawauchi who lost their son Hideya on September 11th.

Tribute Center Progress
Sally Yerkovich

Tribute continues to make progress! Working with BKSJK Architects, the Tribute team has begun to bring our vision for a welcoming, inclusive visitor center closer to reality. Schematic designs for the leased space at 120 Liberty Street are in place and we expect to “break ground” (or, in our case, begin demolition) on June 1.

In three main exhibition and program areas, the Tribute Center will put a human face on the events of February 26, 1993 and September 11, 2001 for the thousands of visitors who are coming daily to the World Trade Center site. Tribute is projected to open in the early spring of 2006.

Public Workshops
Over the past two months, the Tribute Center staff has held a series of public workshops in an effort to gather information from family members, survivors, residents, and rescue workers as well as the general public. This public comment will inform Tribute’s program as we move forward.

We are pleased that response to the Tribute Center has been overwhelmingly positive. All groups with whom we met commented that Tribute will fill a void both within the September 11th community and for World Trade Center site visitors. It will complement what already exists – signage around the site, in the World Financial Center and at St. Paul’s Chapel – providing a more complete picture of the events on 9/11 as well as the response and rebuilding.

Other comments focused upon the stories to be told in the Center. People felt that they should represent all parts of the September 11th community and convey the impact of the events upon the local area, its residents and workers.

Finally, some expressed concerns about the impact of large numbers of visitors to the Tribute Center on the local area. They also urged the Tribute staff to consider carefully how to deal with this volume in the Center’s relatively small space.

All comments were documented and reviewed by the staff and our advisors; they are informing the Tribute Center’s development. We are committed to public outreach and engagement as a means of nourishing the community spirit that inspired Tribute’s creation.

Volunteer Program
The Tribute Center is designed to bring together members of the September 11th community who wish to share their stories with visitors to the World Trade Center site. McKinsey & Company has helped us create a unique volunteer training program that will facilitate this interaction, developing a pool of docents who will lead walking tours as well as volunteers who will help with other aspects of the center’s operations and activities.

Volunteers will participate in a variety of roles, from helping with office tasks (involving little or no visitor interaction) to being a docent (greeting visitors and/or leading tours of the World Trade Center site).

To date, many individuals have expressed interest in helping us with this program, and over the next few months we will continue to recruit volunteers from the September 11th community, reaching out to as many groups as possible. These will include the families of those who perished; survivors; residents; rescue and recovery workers; volunteers from the site; and those affected by the 1993 WTC bombing. We will begin interviewing potential volunteers shortly after July 1, 2005.

Trained volunteers will lead walking tours during which they will share their first-hand experience of what happened on September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993 to deepen the public’s understanding of this incredible story. In turn, visitors will have the unique experience of interacting with members of the September 11th community. This connection between the public and volunteers so personally affected by the attacks further ensures that we never forget those who perished or the amazing response of those who helped afterwards.

Training for a pilot group of twenty volunteers will begin during the month of July. Once the program is tested and many of our logistical questions answered, we will begin to train our regular corps of volunteers. We plan to have a regular tour program operating at the World Trade Center site by the Thanksgiving holidays and a group of 150 volunteers trained and leading tours in the spring of 2006.

If you wish to volunteer or wish more information about our program, you may contact us by e-mail: TributeVolunteers@911families.org.

Future Community Meetings
To spread the news about the Tribute Center we will be conducting a series of community meetings over the next few months. More information on these meetings and their schedule as well as about the Tribute Center will soon be available on our Website: www.911families.org.

New Family Liaison from the OCME
Kimberly Grieger

In March, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) announced that, due to the limits of current technology, the World Trade Center DNA identification process is now paused. A letter detailing this suspension recently went out to all families who have not asked for no contact by the OCME.

“Work continues,” Chief Medical Examiner Charles Hirsch declared. “It may have paused, but ladies and gentlemen, we will never quit.”

To date, 1,161 victims – 42% of the total -- remain unaccounted for. Three victims were identified on March 11, 2005. This brings the total number of victims identified to 1,588 of the 2,749 people who were killed at the World Trade Center.

Any family member who did not receive a letter, or who has concerns or questions can contact the OCME at (212) 447-7884.

Giovanna Vidoli will be replacing Katie Sullivan as World Trade Center family liaison at the Medical Examiner’s Office. You can contact Giovanna at giovanna@ocme.nyc.gov or at (212) 447-7884.
**Camp Better Days**

Where: Island Lake Sports and Arts Center, Starucca PA.  
(www.islandlake.com)

When: August 17-24, 2005

Who: All children between the ages of 6 years old and 16 years old who lost loved ones September 11th, 2001.

**Camp Better Days is free to all eligible children.**

Applications are available on our website  
www.thebetterdaysfoundation.org.

Contact: Amy Callahan, Camp Director  
(201) 216-1561 or email acallahan99@hotmail.com

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**America's Camp 2005**

Enrolling boys & girls ages 7 to 15

For the week-long, sleep-away camp in Lenox, Massachusetts in the Berkshire Mountains

Camp is offered at no cost to all children who lost a parent in the 9/11 attacks. Campers participate in a range of sports, crafts, water activities at the pool and lake, and special events.

Camp runs from Wed., August 17th to Wed., August 24th

For information or to enroll call (800) 548-6295 or visit www.americascamp.org

e-mail: info@americascamp.org

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**Tribute Volunteer Program**

9/11 community members including family members, survivors, residents, recovery workers and 9/11 volunteers are welcome to register for information about the Tribute Center Volunteer Program. Return the enclosed reply card or e-mail TributeVolunteers@911families.org

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We are interested in hearing from you!

Send your feedback or questions to info@911families.org.

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