

9-11 memorial: Windermere teen awarded chunk of World Trade Center

The New York Port Authority, which owns the debris from the 2001 attack, has granted Jeff Cox a 650-pound hunk of twisted steel from one of the fallen twin towers.



Eagle Scout Jeff Cox is pictured in front of the Windermere Town Hall on Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2009. Jeff is one of the few people in the country to get a hold of an official piece of the 9-11 World Trade Center wreckage and will use a steel frame to hold the artifact in a 9-11 memorial at Town Hall. (STEPHEN M. DOWELL/ORLANDO SENTINEL / September 9, 2009)

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WINDERMERE - A 15-year-old Eagle Scout candidate's proposal to build a Sept. 11 memorial has accomplished a rare feat: He's getting an official piece of the fallen World Trade Center to be used in the monument.

Jeff Cox of Windermere and Boy Scout Troop 6 got word last week.

"I just think it's awesome that they're giving this to us," the teen said. "I hope we can make something that can take such a tragic thing and turn it into something where people can reflect and remember."

That's what the nation will be doing today, eight years after nearly 3,000 people died when terrorists flew two hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. That same morning, 125 died in a similar attack on the Pentagon. And 44 were killed when a fourth plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field after passengers fought their hijackers.

Much of the Trade Center buildings' debris has been recycled under the authority of New York City.

The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, which owns the remaining debris, as well as the federal judge overseeing the artifacts from the 2001 attack, have granted Jeff a 650-pound hunk of twisted steel from one of the fallen twin towers.

"We granted just 25 requests last year and have 12 more pending," said Steve Coleman, a spokesman for the Port Authority. An unknown number of artifacts have been given to private citizens, largely from firefighters, police and ground zero workers on the site in the disaster's aftermath.

"We have to be very careful and respectful about where these artifacts wind up," Coleman said. "No one should profit from them,

and we don't send them to private citizens for personal collections."

Jeff's story was first featured in Monday's edition of The New York Times, in a story about how debris from the Trade Center is being used in memorials.

More than 1,000 artifacts are still stored in an 80,000-square-foot hangar at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, and they are considered crime-scene evidence until a federal judge releases items on a case-by-case basis.

Jeff, who was just 7 when the towers fell, said he wanted to honor the people who died in the attacks.

"I remember 9-11," he said. "There were people dying on TV, my teachers were freaking out and my mom came and got me out of school. We didn't know what was going to happen next."

Now a 10th-grader at a private academy, The Crenshaw School, Jeff got the memorial-building idea after talking to a summer camp counselor in June on possible service projects to complete his work for his Eagle Scout badge.

"It was just a lot of work," he said. "I didn't even know if this was possible, but I wanted to try."

Jeff is now going through the design phase of his project, and some local engineers and architects are helping with his vision of a steel cradle to hold the artifact. He is planning for a Feb. 20, 2010, dedication.

At Jeff's request, UPS is going to ship the artifact for free, saving about \$1,200 in freight charges. No shipping date has been arranged yet.

The teen's efforts made him a celebrity in the town of 3,000 in southwest Orange County after he appeared on the front page of the Times.

His mother, Margaret Cox, said that the family was stunned.

"It was just absolutely wonderful," she said. "For all his hard work to get recognized, it's wonderful."

To make the project happen, he made lots of telephone calls and was polite and persistent, his mother said. He approached Windermere Mayor Gary Bruhn after a church service at St. Luke's United Methodist Church and asked for a letter.

"I was flabbergasted," Bruhn said after he learned of Jeff's success. "I thought, 'I know he's a bright kid, but just how on Earth could a kid do this?'"

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- The Longwood Police Department dedicated a memorial in 2005 with a much smaller piece of metal from the twin towers. A candlelight vigil at the memorial is scheduled for 7 p.m. today.
- Retired New York firefighter Peter Capece, now a Clermont resident, got a 12-inch piece of the World Trade Center from a colleague who was part of the 9-11 rescue operation. He has donated it to Clermont, and a memorial is scheduled for 9 a.m. today in front of Clermont Fire Station 1, at 439 W. State Road 50.
- A remembrance ceremony at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University will be from 9:45-10:30 a.m. at Spruance Field, 600 S. Clyde Morris Blvd., Daytona Beach, with opening by university President John P. Johnson, color guard ceremony by Daytona Beach Fire and Police departments and contributions by students, faculty and campus clubs.
- Orlando Fire Department's annual Sept. 11 candlelight memorial service, 7:30 p.m. at Orlando Firehouse 1, 439 S. Magnolia Ave., will include 343 candles to honor each of the firefighters who died in the World Trade Center attacks.