

## Historic artifact arrives in Highland

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Last week a small piece of history arrived in Highland in the form of a 500 pound section of an I-beam that was once part of the World Trade Center Towers that collapsed in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

The twisted steel artifact will be fashioned into a memorial that will be placed in the front grassy area of the Highland Fire House next to the black obelisk. This year's 9/11 remembrance ceremony will dedicate this memorial.

Jerry Erichsen, who is a member of the Fire Department, volunteered to drive his flatbed down to pick up the beam from a Port Authority hanger at JFK airport, where much of the 911 material is stored.

"It was touching when I walked through that place and saw the police cars and the fire trucks," he said. "Everybody should really see that because seeing it on television is one thing, but seeing it for real makes your hair stand up."

Erichsen said he is glad he made the trip.

"It felt very good to show respect for what happened and for what we lost," he said.

Firefighter Everett Erichsen said the members of the Fire Department agreed to send the request, which was granted 6 months ago by the Port Authority.

"You tell them what size you want and they choose what fits your needs," he said. "There will be a plaque and we'll have pavers in the walkway all the way up to it."

Erichsen said he felt a "big satisfaction" in obtaining the piece of steel.

"There's a brotherhood amongst all firefighters, no matter if you're paid or a volunteer, that's what it comes down to," he said. "Being able to remember those who passed on 9/11 is a great feeling, no matter if you're a firefighter, ambulance, police officer or someone who was working in that building."

Erichsen said the I-beam is being stored inside the Fire House while volunteers design the memorial that will soon be constructed.

Lloyd Sgt. James Janso escorted the flatbed to and from the city.

“It was unbelievable to see the actual damage that was done to the fire trucks and police cars and the actual metal bending,” he said of the stored material. “It was sobering and numbing to see it.”

Janso said he hopes one day there will be a museum to house these artifacts so that everyone can fully understand what happened on that fateful day “so you never forget it.”

“I didn’t think we’d get that up close,” he said. “I’ve never seen anything like it in my 20 years [on the force].”

William Cavanaugh, who is a member of Rolling Thunder NY Chapter 3, was on hand for the unloading of the steel artifact at the Highland Fire House.

“It brings a piece of history to always remember and never forget,” he said. “When you go by this site, every time, it will always be a reminder because you don’t see it enough. I had to go touch it myself. It’s unbelievable that something that strong – it was an I-beam – and to see it distorted and to think there were people perhaps under that or holding on; you never know. It just puts it in perspective.”

Members of the Highland American Legion held a brief flag ceremony to remove and fold the flag that was placed over the I-beam on the flatbed. Post Commander Vito Dispensa said “this is something that is dear to our hearts.” He said a friend’s mother-in-law perished on the plane that crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

“When I look at this piece of metal, I think of her,” he said. “It hurts to be put in that position to look at a piece of metal and think of all the people that died. It’s just very sad.”

Dispensa said it is important to have this artifact in Highland.

“This will always be a memory of what happened,” he said. “In some ways it’s a pleasure to look at it, to know we have a piece of history. In other ways it’s very sad to look at to know of all the people who died because of this, and needlessly died. It was very uncalled for, for what they did to us.”

Dispensa said he has participated in many flag-folding ceremonies as Post Commander, [but] “today it was like folding a flag for 3,000 who died.”

Legion member Ben Bragg Sr. said he also is a life member of the Highland Hose Company.

“Through that I understand what it means to lose our buddies under circumstances like this,” he said.

Bragg said the firefighters and emergency personnel who perished on 9/11 made the selfless decision to do all they could to save lives. The pain of their loss and the loss of so many civilians will never go away. But this

small artifact will remind people today and in the future of what happened on a warm, late summer's day in September nearly a decade ago.

“It's great that this little piece of information that's come back is going to be in Highland forever,” he said.