

# DAILY NEWS

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## BREAKING NEWS

# Survivor-guided tours try to fill in the emptiness at ground zero

BY NAHAL TOOSI

NEW YORK (AP) — Sixteen acres. Seven buildings. Tens of thousands of people. Two looming towers. A doomed Zip Code — 10048.

This tour of ground zero included plenty of statistics.

Then, it was Marianne Barry's turn to make it all real. So she held up her husband's picture and began: Maurice Barry was a Port Authority police officer. His wife and children waited for him to come home Sept. 11, 2001, but he didn't. They got his gun, but no remains to bury.

"This is like a cemetery for us," she said, glancing at the gaping hole behind her.

A visit to ground zero today requires an imagination. After all, what was once there no longer is. And what's supposed to replace it won't be there for years. Instead, even as the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks arrives, there is a fence around a construction site, with a few somber signs describing the attacks and listing those who perished.

It's not much, but the site nonetheless attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors a year, by conservative estimates.

About a year ago, a group of people with close connections to the Sept. 11 attacks began offering tours through an organization called the Tribute WTC Visitors Center. The center's guides include survivors, people who lost loved ones, emergency workers and other volunteers.

"The people who were coming here not only want information about what happened but they want to pay their

respects to somebody," said Lynn Tierney, president of the center, adding later, "It's terribly intense interaction."

Each tour usually includes two guides, or "docents." The visitors walk along the fence around the site — they are not allowed inside the fenced off area — and into nearby buildings, including the World Financial Center, to get optimal views. The guides are equipped with pictures of the towers and historical information about the site.

They spend a lot of time helping tourists get a sense of place prior to the attacks, something television and photographs can't fully convey.

Paige Pantezzi, who fled one of the burning buildings that day, tells people the Twin Towers served as a navigational system for New Yorkers. "They were our compass," said Pantezzi, 34. "They were like our sun and our moon."

Mickey Kross, a lieutenant who recently retired from the fire department, was trapped under the rubble for a few hours. To those who ask him how it felt, many of whom are shy or nervous about approaching, he says, "Creepy!"

Some visitors don't ask questions at all, offering tears and hugs instead.

The center is the most prominent organization offering tours of the Trade Center site. Its startup, construction and programming costs have come to about \$6 million so far, including \$3 million from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and \$3 million from the Lower Manhattan Development Corp.

But it remains a work in progress. The center's facilities at 120 Liberty St., which will include galleries

documenting Sept. 11 and the worldwide response, formally open Sept. 6. Its Web site is still bare bones. It has engaged in relatively little advertising.

Yet, its tours attract dozens at a time, many of whom are at first unaware of the guides' connections to the tragic day. Center officials estimate that by the end of September, their guides will have taken 20,000 people around the site. Tierney said it's possible that once the Sept. 11 memorial is built the Tribute Center tours will be the site's official tours.

The center now has more than 120 guides. It offers two tours a day on weekdays and four a day on the weekends. Tierney said the goal is to have more than 300 guides and offer more daily tours in the future.

Reserved tickets cost \$10 apiece, but at this point, many people just show up and are not charged. "We're getting overwhelmed right now," Tierney said. "We may have to rely on reservations solely soon."

For visitors, many of whom were thousands of miles away when the planes appeared in New York's skyline, it can be overwhelming to hear what the person leading them endured that day.

"It just brings it to a different level completely," said Mary Goldman, 40, who was visiting from Anaheim Hills, Calif., and heard Barry's tale. "It's a treasure that they have, and they don't have to share it, but they are sharing it with us."

The tour guides say they benefit, too. Barry said it's therapeutic to talk about her husband.

"I think that's why I do it," she said.