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Metro

Tribute Center, an 'Interim Destination' Memorial, Gets Set to Open

BY DAVID W. DUNLAP

Keys to the Jeep, a 20-trip PATH card and a bank deposit slip; perfectly ordinary things to carry on what began as a perfectly ordinary Tuesday. A firefighter's sundered turnout coat. A daughter's handmade fishing lure, never to be used again. A basketball jersey signed by the seventh and eighth graders who have lost their coach.

A death certificate with this box checked on Line 8: Homicide.

"How would you want your loved one to be remembered?" asked Lynn Tierney, the president of the Tribute Center, the first visitors' center at ground zero, which will open today for private visits — victims' relatives, survivors of the attack, neighbors, and rescue and recovery workers — then to the public on Sept. 18.

Occupying a storefront at 120 Liberty Street, opposite the World Trade Center site, the Tribute Center has four ground-floor galleries taking a visitor from the construction of the twin towers through 9/11 and its aftermath to a room where the dead are



Lee Ielpi, the vice president of the September 11th Families' Association, near a display featuring his son Jonathan's turnout coat and helmet.

commemorated in hundreds of photographs on a 10-by-30-foot wall, with personal mementos nearby.

"While we build a grand memorial and memorial museum at the World Trade Center site," Gov. George E. Pataki said yesterday, "the Tribute Center will be an interim destination for the millions of visitors who come here to learn and share experiences with the Sept. 11 community."

This will be a long interim. The memorial is not

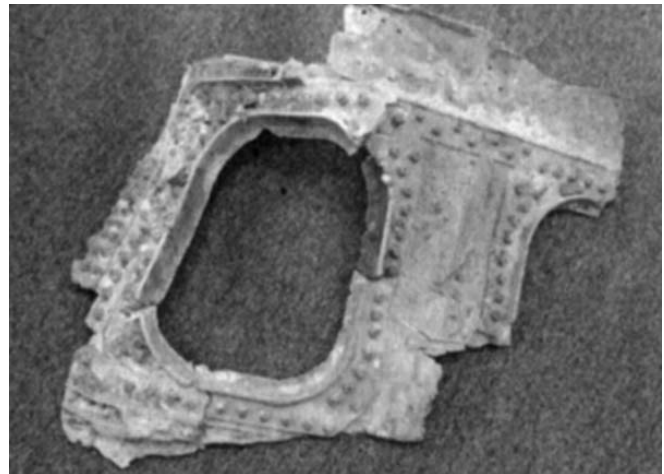
to open until 2009.

Meanwhile, as many as 2,000 visitors are expected at the Tribute Center every day, said Jennifer Adams, the chief executive of the September 11th Families' Association, which developed the center. BKSK Architects designed it. It cost about \$3.4 million to build and was financed by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

When it opens to the

public, visitors will be asked to make a \$10 contribution, or \$40 for a family, though they can walk in for free. The center will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday and Tuesday.

Visitors will enter a gallery about the construction of the trade center and its vibrant everyday life, centered on an eight-foot-tall model.



On display are, left, a gun that melted in the intense heat and, right a section of airplane fuselage with a window frame. Other items include contents of a victim's pockets and mementos contributed by relatives.

They will turn a corner into the second gallery to find what may be the most unnerving artifact: a mangled section of an airliner's fuselage with one whole passenger window recognizably intact. This riveted, rounded portal almost invites a viewer to imagine what an awful panorama it must have framed for someone that morning.

"We don't want to know which plane this came from," said Lee Ielpi, the vice president of the families' association, explaining that in its anonymity, the wreckage stands for a more universal loss.

In the third gallery, within sight of a monumentally deformed steel beam, is one of Mr. Ielpi's donations to the exhibition: the battered helmet and turnout coat, torn down the right side, that were worn by his son Jonathan. The helmet carries badge number 12642,

which was Mr. Ielpi's when he was a New York City firefighter and was passed on to Jonathan, who was killed on 9/11, then to Jonathan's

The center will open today for private visits, and to the public on Sept. 18

brother, Brendan, who is now a firefighter.

Responding to the center's request for personal mementos, Evelyn Tepedino sent a pink and green fishing lure made by her daughter, Jody Nichilo, who worked in the north tower, and a note she wrote when she was about 10: "Dear Mom, Hi! How are you. I am fine. Well, I am writing this letter

to tell you that I am going to wash the dishes tonight. O.K. Well, see you later. Love ya."

Ms. Tepedino, who lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, said it was difficult to choose a few remembrances. "There was so much to say," she said. "How can I shorten it and make anyone aware of who she was?"

Theresa Roberts sent a basketball jersey signed by the team at St. Catherine's Church in Glen Rock, N.J., in memory of her husband and their coach, Timothy J. Finnerty. "I had pictures and other articles," she said, "but more than anything else, that shirt was who Tim was."

"It means something that other people see in that shirt what I do," she added. The jersey bears many signatures, including those of John Embry ("You pushed me to be a better player"), Daniel Kenny ("Your presence on the court made us all better players") and Dane Osborn ("Your love

for basketball inspired us all").

In an even more intimate tribute, the family of Alfred J. Braca donated items that were recovered from his pockets, depicting someone who was simply on his way to work: Cantor Fitzgerald ID cards, \$76 in cash, Jeep keys on a remote-lock fob with a panic button, a deposit slip still in its original triplicate form and several credit cards with 2002 expiration dates.

Ann Johnson wanted to convey a more pointed message by sending a copy of the death certificate issued for her son Scott. Regarding that ornate document, she hopes visitors will focus on Line 8, as she did in October 2001.

"I looked at it and saw the word 'Homicide,' and that broke my heart all over again," Mrs. Johnson recalled. "We talk about those who were lost. We use all these euphemisms. But, in fact, it was murder."