

9/11 ANNIVERSARY

20 YEARS AFTER THE ATTACK THAT

CHANGED THE NATION



Firefighters, police officers and others remember dropping what they were doing and watching the TV from Albert Lea when they heard the news of the 9/11 attacks. PROVIDED

Firefighters, law enforcement reflect on where they were on 9/11

By Sarah Stultz
sarah.stultz@albertleatribune.com

Remembering the attacks on 9/11 brings back a variety of emotions for people — especially for first responders.

Whether they were already in their present positions or just getting started in the field, all agree it was a day that they will never forget.

The Tribune interviewed several officers and deputies with the Albert Lea Police Department and Freeborn County Sheriff's Office, along with firefighters with Albert Lea Fire Rescue, about their memories from the day 20 years ago.

Adam Conn

For Albert Lea Officer Adam Conn, 9/11 was his first day on the job at the Albert Lea Police Department. He said he had just reported for

“I had a big range of emotion from sadness to anger just thinking about what happened and that this happened on American soil. It seems to me like it just happened yesterday.”

— Emergency Management Director Rich Hall

duty and was assigned to his trainer, and within a couple hours of being on shift, news broke out that the World Trade Center towers had been hit.

Officers flocked back to the squad room, where he said they spent a majority of the day watching the events unfold on television.

He remembers feeling upset and angry that something like that could happen in the United States,

a country that is usually known for having strong intelligence.

Being a new officer, he said it was eye-opening for him.

“It was the big picture right there,” Conn said. “It’s day one, and it’s like, ‘Holy cow, what am I getting into?’ Twenty years later I look back on it, and I wouldn’t change a thing. I love my job. I like what I do and helping people.”

He said he hopes the United States has enough intelligence that something like 9/11 will never happen again.

Rich Hall

Freeborn County Emergency Management Director Rich Hall said he was driving into Rochester and was about a mile out of town when he heard that the first plane had hit one of the World Trade Center towers.

He didn’t hear what size of plane had hit so he didn’t know what to think, but when the second plane hit, he knew right away, “Oh man, we’re in trouble.”

Hall had retired from his military service in April only a few months prior.

He said he remembers calling several of his friends still in the military

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‘All that mattered was love and life’

FORMER TRIBUNE PHOTOGRAPHER SHARES HER EXPERIENCES OF NEW YORK ON 9/11

By Sarah Stultz
sarah.stultz@albertleatribune.com

Before Trish Lease Way became a photographer at the Albert Lea Tribune in December 2001, she worked for a period at the New York Times.

Though she worked as a photographer shooting assignments for the newspaper and was even employed full time in-house in the photography department for five years, she said she was not officially on assignment on Sept. 11, 2001, when two planes crashed into the World Trade Center towers as part of an al Qaeda terror attack.

Living in the West Village at the time, she said she was walking her two dogs in downtown Manhattan on Cedar Street only a few blocks away from the World Trade Center towers when she witnessed a plane crash into the first tower.



Trish Lease Way

“I had a choice to make that infamous day,” she said. “Am I a civilian or a journalist right now? I decided to be a civilian.”

She said she safely put her dogs back in her apartment and went back into the area now known as Ground Zero and assisted anyone who needed help.

“I gave water to police officers, firemen and all the victims that made it out alive,” she said. “I wiped the human ash out of strangers’ eyes. I hugged complete strangers with unconditional love. I directed victims to EMS areas.”

She recalls meeting one man after the towers collapsed who was in severe shock and who was cut and bleeding.

He told her he had a fight with his wife that morning, and she tried to calm him down and give him water.

“My wife, she is going to think I’m dead,” he told her as he said he was supposed to have been on a flight that morning.

He got louder and louder, and Lease Way said people started to gather around them. Many cell phones were down that day, and she asked him out loud what his phone number was. He told her

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‘It was hard for my students to comprehend what had just happened’

TEACHERS RECALL WATCHING EVENTS UNFOLD FROM THE CLASSROOM

By Tyler Julson
tyler.julson@albertleatribune.com

Many people, young and old alike, could probably tell you where they were and what they were doing on the day of Sept. 11, 2001. For the younger generation, it was sitting in a classroom preparing for the school day to begin. But what about the teachers? How did they handle the news and what was it like with numerous children looking to you for possible answers?

Four teachers at Albert Lea High School who were on staff on that day in 2001 are still teaching in the school today. Jim Haney, Ken Fiscus, Diane Heaney and Mindy Kruger all say the day started just like any other.

For Haney, the day began by wishing a friend and colleague a happy birthday. Fiscus was teaching in his advisory period, and Heaney was teaching voice lessons.

Their stories about how they heard the news were relatively the same: A student or fellow



Ken Fiscus, along with Jim Haney, Mindy Kruger and Diane Heaney are the four remaining teachers at Albert Lea High School who were with the district on the day of the 9/11 attacks. Fiscus said he remembers that day to be one of the worst days of his life up to that point. TYLER JULSON/ALBERT LEA TRIBUNE

staff member came into their rooms with the distressing news. Fiscus said he didn’t believe it when he first heard about it.

“In bolts this kid who was a troublemaker, not in my advisory group, he charges in ‘Mr. Fiscus, turn on your TV. Two planes just hit the World Trade Center.’ I said ‘Josh, get out of here.’ I didn’t believe him,” Fiscus said. “He just popped in my room and said that out of the blue. Then a quiet kid who was in my advisory comes in right behind him and silently shook his head. It looked like he’d seen a ghost. That’s when I walked over

and turned on the TV.”

Haney said a teacher came into his classroom as he was teaching about the American Revolution and told him about the first plane. He said he didn’t think much of it at the time because he thought it was a small single-engine plane that was involved in an accident. Haney said when the lesson was done, a student asked if they could turn on the TV and see what damage had been done.

“I had turned on the TV and I knew that this was much worse

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Covering 9/11 in the Tribune

To forever remember



The Tribune's front page from Sept. 12, 2001, is shown.



A memorial stands at the site of the World Trade Centers in New York where the towers collapsed after the worst terror attack on American soil. PROVIDED

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MEMORIES

Continued from Front Page

the number, which she repeated and then watched as three others and herself tried to dial it. She stopped to find others to also call, and at one point had about 25 people calling his number.

"He is still saying it over and over again, 'My wife ... flight ... she thinks I'm dead. They're all dead. They're all dead,' he said. 'She is going to think I am dead.'"

About 15 minutes later, in the distance, she said she heard a man make it through on the phone to the other man's wife and then run over to let the man speak on the phone.

"The hysterical man grabs the phone as it is still in mid-air heading toward his ear and mouthed, 'Baby, baby, I'm here. I love you. I love you. I'm so sorry. I love you.'"

"The gatherers all cheered, clapped, whistled," Lease Way said. "Me, I clapped, cheered, fell

down on my knees, feeling the rubble and stones smash my kneecaps and the goose bumps filled my being, tears of joy running down my ash-covered face, knowing right then and there nothing else really matters but the love we have for ourselves and the love we share with each other."

She said the day was a sad one in her life, but it was also a life-changing experience for her.

"On that day, we were all equal on the hectic avenues of downtown Manhattan," Lease Way said. "On that day, CEOs were equal to janitors — all trades, all financial classes were equal. It didn't matter in those hours what you did for a living or how much money you had. All that mattered was love and life."

That same fall, she said she was working on assignment for the New York Times on a day suspected anthrax was mailed to the newspaper.

She said she was stopped at the front door by a security guard, who took her photo assignment and offered to bring it in for

her. He warned her if she stepped into the building, she would be under 24-hour quarantine for anthrax. All of her co-workers were stuck on the fourth floor of the building.

"I walked away from that building that evening and never returned," she said. "I was filled with fear and anxiety."

The next day she applied for the photographer position at the Tribune in Albert Lea and moved out of Manhattan a month and a half later and came to Minnesota.

"Albert Lea and the beautiful people I met along the way will always hold a special place in my mind and heart," she said.

Lease Way now lives in Hudson Valley, New York, with her husband and two Dalmatians, Casey and Cleo.

"Every year I light white candles and put them in windows to honor those who have passed on and their families," she said.

She also shares the story about the man on social media every year and has not yet missed a year.

TEACHERS

Continued from Front Page

a building," Haney said. "About a minute into watching, the first tower fell and my heart sank knowing that thousands of people had just died. My students were silent and respectful as they knew the gravity of the situation."

Heaney said she turned on the classroom TV just as the second plane crashed into the towers. She said she couldn't believe what she was seeing. She remembered going into the bathroom, shaking and saying a prayer for the country and for everyone involved.

The rest of the day was a lot different than any other normal day. Heaney said she had two different choir classes throughout the rest of the day and everyone was in shock. She said she gave her classes the option of singing or not, and everyone decided the music they were working one was an appropriate way of expressing their emotions at the time. Heaney said they sang, talked and tried to carry on the best they could.

Haney said he kept the TV on in his classroom the rest of the day so he and his students could stay up to date on what was happening.

"It was hard for my students to comprehend what

had just happened, just like it was hard for me to understand," Haney said. "The questions they had were 'What happened? And 'Who would do this?' I did not have a good answer."

Both Haney and Fiscus compared it to the Pearl Harbor attacks. Fiscus talked about what was going through his head when he first saw the destruction.

"This was war," Fiscus said. "The only thing I could compare it to when I was talking to the kids was, this is what Pearl Harbor may have felt like for my grandparents ... Both towers had already been hit. We've been attacked. Life is going to be different from here on out."

Heaney, Fiscus and Haney all called the day one of the saddest in American history. After school practices and activities were canceled that day, allowing students and staff to be home and see their families.

"I remember just wanting to get home and hug my husband and kids," Heaney said. "They were little at the time and we tried not to scare them and limited what they saw on TV, but everyone knew something bad had happened."

Fiscus said he remembers how everyone came together in the days that followed the event.

"One of the neat changes was how patriotic every-

body was," Fiscus said. "You couldn't find an American flag in any stores. That Halloween, the number one costume was a firefighter."

As part of the lesson plans on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Haney said students will be watching segments of survivors and family members of the victims talk about that day. He said it is important for students today to be taught about it because they were not alive when it happened and it's his job as an educator to make sure they know the story of that day.

In 2012, Haney was named the Minnesota History Teacher of the Year, which allowed him to study for a week with the curator of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum. He said he heard multiple stories of bravery during his time there.

"If you get a chance, please go to New York City and spend a day at the (9/11) Museum and Memorial," Haney said. "It is one of the saddest places on earth, but so important that we remember the sacrifice of all the people, firefighters, police, soldiers, victims and survivors of the attack. History has to be remembered in its totality, the good and the bad. 9/11 was the worst day, but it must be remembered or we will forget the sacrifice of so many."



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Tribune staff reflect on where they were on 9/11

The whirlwind felt on 9/11 from the airport

I was actually in the air when the first plane struck the World Trade Center. A co-worker and I were flying from Kentucky to a big meeting in New Orleans, with a connecting flight in St. Louis.



Terri Green

We were supposed to leave with the rest of our group the day before, but we were tasked with revising our presentation. So after about four hours of sleep, we boarded an early morning flight on Sept. 11 with the final presentation in hand. Little did we know that we would never give that presentation. When we landed in St. Louis, our only thoughts were to grab a quick breakfast and make our connecting flight. As we walked through the concourse, we saw a group of people looking up at a TV with shocked expressions, so we stopped to see what was happening. And as we watched, the second plane struck. From that moment on, it was like we had entered the Twilight Zone. All outgoing flights were canceled, so we knew we weren't going to make it to New Orleans. Thanks to quick thinking on the part of a co-worker back in the office, she secured a rental car so we could drive back home to Louisville. We had to leave our luggage behind, as no checked luggage was being released in case one contained something dangerous. As we made our way through the airport to our rental car, we saw numerous armed guards with search dogs walking through the crowds of stranded travelers. That was a scary sight. When we finally were leaving the airport in our rental car, an image of the airport tarmac packed with airplanes three and four deep was burned forever

in my memory. During our five-hour drive back home, we were immersed in radio news reports as the events of the day unfolded. We prayed for those who lost their lives, and we thanked God that we would be with our families very soon. Our co-workers who were in New Orleans were not so fortunate. They weren't able to get back home until five days later. I am still thankful that I was not part of that group.

— Terri Green

Feelings of shock and tears as events played out

The morning of this tragic event we both went to work as usual. Jack owned his own business and was working from home and watching the morning news, when they broke in when the towers were hit.

Jack was numb and shocked. Watched every minute and couldn't believe it. I had just gotten to work at the Midtown Liquor just before 8 and turned on the TV in my office. The news broke in and showed the towers being hit.

It was unbelievable. Tears came to my eyes and I called Jack. My thoughts turned to those that ran from fear and the heroes risking their lives for others.

I WILL NEVER FORGET 9/11--2001

— Donna Werner

Stop the press!

On Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001, I was still a "newbie" at the Albert Lea Tribune with just a little over five months under my belt. Back then, we had an afternoon paper so our deadline to go to print was 9 a.m. When I would come into work at 8 a.m., the newsroom staff would be scurrying to wrap

everything up before the deadline, and it was common knowledge that you did not bother them with anything until after the deadline unless it was an emergency or pertinent to the issue that was going to press.

I believe that it was just a little before or after 9 a.m. when my co-worker got a phone call from her grandma that said we should turn the TV on because something was happening in New York. We had a TV in the newsroom, so she told the editor what her grandma had said. He turned the TV on and knew that this news was big and needed to be reported immediately.

At this time, our newspaper was still printed in Austin, so the editor (or maybe the publisher) got on the phone and literally said "Stop the press!" It took several hours to get information on what was actually going on, but once they had it, they changed the headline and front page story and reprinted it. Our Tribune phones were ringing off the hook because the papers were very late. It turned into one of those "hard to work days" between answering the phones and wanting to watch the TV and waiting for information from the editor as he received it.

— Michelle Rasmussen

From the eyes of a fourth grader

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was in fourth grade at Northwood-Kensett elementary school. I was in Mr. Park's classroom, but the day hadn't officially started when the first tower was hit around 7:45 a.m.

I remember a lot of that day was spent watching the news in our room. Being fourth graders, we were right on that line of being able to grasp what was happening, and I was grateful for the opportunity to keep

up with what was going on. Like many people, I thought it was a tragic accident at first, but then I remember watching the TV as the second plane hit. I remember just being very confused.

Being so young, my classmates and I had never really been exposed to acts of war and terrorism. In a way, prior to 9/11, we were all very much blind to events around the world. As a fourth grader, you rarely, if ever, think about what's happening outside of your personal world, let alone on the other side of the globe in countries you've probably never heard of. 9/11 changed that.

From that day forward, I remember constantly being worried about what was happening in the Middle East. Could it happen again? Where would the next attack be? Not things your average fourth grader should have to worry about.

On the flip side, I remember seeing how the nation came together after that day. And it didn't take long either. We were one America that day. As a sports fan, I remember the first home Mets games after 9/11. I got goosebumps when Mike Piazza hit a home run late in the game to put the Mets over the top, and the stadium went wild.

It's crazy to think about how our lives were forever changed after that day. Of course, the decades-long war that followed comes to mind, but what about how people traveled? I had never flown on a plane before then, but I couldn't imagine not going through TSA before a flight.

Is 9/11 something I still think about on a daily basis? No. But when I do think about that day, it brings back so many feelings and memories. Even to this day, watching videos of the planes crashing into the buildings makes my stomach drop a little bit. Hearing all the stories from the loved ones of people who were lost that



Michelle Rasmussen



Tyler Julson

day or from the survivors is always sad to hear, but I also think it's important we remember them by sharing their stories every year.

— Tyler Julson

A day to never forget

As I was seated in the middle of my 12th-grade Advanced Placement English class in high school, a woman knocked on the door of our classroom and explained that something horrible had happened.

We were in one of the two trailers-turned-classrooms at the school.

The woman told us that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center's north tower, and my teacher, Mrs. Pufko, turned on the TV.

A senior in high school, I wasn't quite sure what to think.

I don't think I had much time to think, actually, because shortly after we turned on the TV, another plane crashed into the

south tower.

We sat in silence as we watched.

The memories that follow are kind of a blur. I can't remember how long we sat there like that or if we watched the footage in any of our other classes. I can't remember if we watched footage after the plane crashed into the Pentagon just a few hours away or the plane crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

All I can remember to this day is the uneasy feeling I had in my stomach as we went on with the rest of the day.

The next day, I remember telling my dad, the most avid of the newspaper readers in our home, that I wanted to keep the copy of our local paper, The Roanoke Times, that day.

I knew it was going to be something I wanted documented.

I pull that paper out periodically to remind me what took place.

— Sarah Stultz

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