

Oregon Flight for Freedom *linked country from sea to shining sea*

By Jim Cornelius
Editor in Chief

Jack McGowan was up early on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, listening to NPR as he does most mornings. The broadcast faded out and a bulletin announced that a plane had hit one of the towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York.

McGowan's first thought was that there had been a terrible accident. Then a second plane hit a second tower — and the world changed.

"You're rocked back on your heels," he recalled. "I yelled to [wife] Jan, 'Oh, my God, Jan — we've got a terrorist attack!'"

McGowan had been living in Oregon since 1970, and was serving as co-executive director of the environmental nonprofit SOLV (Stop Oregon Litter and Vandalism). But he was a native New Yorker, and the attack hit home with great force.

"I watched the towers being built," he recalled. "Two years before, I took Jan and [son] Travis to see my New York, and we went out to lunch at Windows of the World (the restaurant at the top of the North Tower of the WTC)."

The dark events of September 11, and the wound it inflicted on his country and the city of his birth came down hard on McGowan.

"All of a sudden, I just broke loose," he said. "I cried and cried and couldn't stop crying. The initial shock settled into profound grief."

Flickering in his heart, beneath the grief, was a desire to do... something... a need to take some positive action in the face of tragedy. An opportunity soon presented itself.

Tapping his background in media, the TV station KGW asked McGowan to host local cutaways that were part of a national telethon to support 9/11 relief. At that telethon broadcast, McGowan connected with Sho Dozono, owner of Portland-based Azumano Travel and his wife, Loen.

Loen Dozono had an idea, what McGowan characterizes as "a bold act of perseverance, of looking terrorism in the eye and not blinking." Dozono proposed enacting a "reverse Oregon Trail," bringing Oregonians east to New York to show solidarity and provide an economic shot in the arm for a city that was pummeled, shut down, and reeling. They mulled the possibility of a bus caravan, but that seemed too slow and cumbersome.

"This had to be immediate," McGowan said.

They had to fly. Planes had been grounded across the nation in the wake of the attack, and no one really knew what was going to happen with air travel in the coming weeks, or what threats civilian airliners might yet face. But they had to fly. And the idea for the Oregon Flight for Freedom was born.

McGowan put every bit of passion and emotion that had washed over him into

helping make it happen. He wasn't sure he could leave his responsibilities with SOLV to make the trip, but Jan insisted that he *had* to go. He needed to be "part of something that was larger than just grief."

He was assigned to an advance team to prepare the ground in New York for what was swiftly becoming an enormous event.

In a 10-year retrospective published in *The Oregonian* in 2010, Sho Dozono recalled:

"A thousand Oregonians responded to our call, from all over Oregon and southwest Washington. There were folks who had never been to New York; some had never flown before. World War II battle veterans joined. Grandparents brought their grandkids. Whole families flew together. Roger Hinshaw, president of

Bank of America, took his two children out of school to join us. Mayor Vera Katz had to overcome her fear of flying to lead us. Nick Fish, a New York transplant, used all of his contacts in New York and arranged for a memorial at Union Square to honor the victims. Firefighters; police officers; mayors from Eugene, Hermiston, and other small towns joined the growing number of political leaders."

The organizers had to weigh the impact of what they were doing.

"The responsibility suddenly weighed so heavily on us," McGowan recalled.

Was bringing 1,000 Oregonians to New York really the right thing to do? Was it too much of a burden on a city that was still reeling?

Would they be making the Oregonians a target for a follow-on terrorist attack?

But it quickly became apparent that New York didn't just welcome the Flight, "they were desperate for it," McGowan said.

McGowan arrived in New York on October 1, where the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel waived room fees to put the Oregonians up. McGowan helped set up an international press office for the Flight, and liaised with a range of New York officials and media.

Then, he took a bit of time for himself.

"I went down [to lower Manhattan] the next day by myself because I needed to decompress — but I also needed time to mourn," he said.

The area around what was being called Ground Zero was covered in thick layers of dust, and there was paper everywhere, scattered from thousands of offices in the collapsed Towers. There was a terrible smell of pulverized concrete, burning, and decomposition.

"Below Canal Street, the city had stopped," McGowan said. "You could feel the oppressive sense on every single thing. People didn't even look at each other... it was this unbelievable sense of shock and mourning."

The pall of grief and mourning contrasted with an exuberant welcome for the Oregon delegation. Broadway entertainers performed for them at the Waldorf. The welcome created a very human



Oregon Flight for Freedom representatives rang the bell at the reopening of the New York Stock Exchange after the September 11 attacks.

Sisters Country artist *memorialized fallen* of September 11

One of the great challenges in coping with terrible events like the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 is finding a way to appropriately memorialize the fallen. It fell to Sisters Country artist Lawrence Stoller to help create a memorial to 11 American Express employees who were killed when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed after being struck by planes flown by al Qaida terrorists on that Tuesday morning 20 years ago.

In an article in *Lapidary Magazine*, Stoller recalled:

"Shortly after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, my wife, Sunni, and I pictured a giant crystal installed at Ground Zero. We shared a vision of a monument that would bring badly needed light and healing to our country's collective wound. Nearly a year later a friend in the

mineral business called from New York. Harvey Siegel, owner of Aurora Minerals, asked if I would be interested in being part of a project to memorialize the 11 employees from American Express who had died in the World Trade Center attacks. Before my mind could formulate an answer, my heart said, 'Yes, of course.' I was humbled by the extraordinary opportunity and the profound honor of being part of such an undertaking...

"The memorial was to consist of an 11-sided pool of water, around which the names of those who had died would be inscribed, one to each side. Behind each name, a five-line description of each person, supplied by family members, would appear etched beneath the surface of the water, with the words 'September 11, 2001,' inscribed in the center. The

pool would be mirrored by a matching, 11-sided canopy in the 35-foot ceiling. Both uniting and creating tension between this heaven and earth, an 11-sided crystal suspended by 11 cables would hover two inches above the water, the crystal's image mirrored in the reflecting pool. Drops of water would intermittently fall from 11 small holes in the ceiling symbolizing tears for each of those lost; thus the name, Eleven Tears."

The work was intense and demanding. Looking back on it, Stoller sees how the terrible events of the time, and the effort to appropriately memorialize the fallen, created a sense of unity and solidarity that is often missing from our discourse today. In a note to *The Nugget*, Stoller reflected on his relationship with his colleague Peter W. Small, a Sisters resident who died in

2010:

"Peter W. Small and I had a relationship which stands as a touchstone for me as I watch our country and our world become ever more polarized," Stoller said. "Peter was an exceptional craftsman, engineer, and metal worker. We joined forces in the late 1990s when I commandeered him to do bronze and metal work to compliment my lapidary and large gem and crystal carvings. When I was commissioned by American Express to do the centerpiece for their Eleven Tears Memorial, they asked how long the project would take. I told them the last large project I did took three years. They said, 'you have seven months to get this done,' in honor of those who were lost.

Peter was there to help me with the intricate metal work and engineering of the sculpture. We would work

for hours at a time problem-solving and doing the tedious work of bringing the sculpture to form.

"Our time working was spontaneously laced with humor and observations about what was important in life. But when it came to politics and religion, Peter and I were diametrically opposed. If we started riffing on either a political or religious topic, we would quickly become embedded in our ingrained, righteous beliefs. While these discussions could get heated, one or the other of us would artfully break the spell of our entrenched positions with a joke, usually at our own expense.

"As staunch as our individual beliefs were, we always surrendered them to the overriding truth that our friendship and creative process were far more real, and important than our well-worn, unbending