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FEATURES

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■ A former student living in New York City was at ground zero the day terrorist attacks occurred

By Marcus Hathcock
Oregon Daily Emerald

More than two weeks after the terrorist attacks, the effects are still being felt across America. University students and faculty have been affected, but the campus community extends beyond the state of Oregon.

The University Alumni Association has thick, confidential packets containing the names of hundreds of former students who live within close proximity to the terrorist attacks.

According to Alumni Association Events Assistant Jeannine Jones, the University Alumni headquarters in 120 Agate Hall has kept in close contact with the New York City chapter, although they have no information on whether former students are missing in the attacks. A handful of New York-based alumni have called the headquarters to relay their stories to the University. Jones remembers one female caller who said she was trapped in a subway car for nearly five hours.

Callers to many of the business telephone numbers of New York alumni were met with an automated greeting from New York City's local telephone company.

"We're sorry; due to telephone facility trouble, we cannot complete your call at this time. Please try your call again later."

These simple messages further illuminated the enormity of the attacks on the city. Large corporations had telephone numbers that either did not work or redirected the caller to a new number.

Despite the communications problems in the city, one New York City alumnus was available to talk. 1975 history graduate and former Emerald reporter Jim Pensiero was working across the street from "ground zero" on that fateful day.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Pensiero, an assistant managing editor in administration for the Wall Street Journal, arrived at his office at 8 a.m., as if it was a normal day.

But his work was interrupted when he received a surprising phone call from his wife at about 8:55 a.m., informing him that the north tower of the World Trade Center had been hit in some kind of an accident.

"I didn't hear or feel anything," Pensiero recalled.

Soon after the call, he looked out a window that faced the World Trade Center towers to see the north tower on fire. Four floors in the upper area of the building were spewing flames and business documents, he said.

"I wasn't sure what hit it. I didn't know if it was a bomb, or what," Pensiero said.

Whatever the situation, Pensiero's boss, Paul Steigel, suggested he prepare the backup newsroom in South Brunswick, New Jersey, for use because evacuation seemed certain.

While making the necessary phone calls for preparation, the second plane slammed into the south tower.

"That one I felt," Pensiero said. "It really shook our building."

Steigel ordered everyone to relocate to the New Jersey newsroom, and an announcement over the intercom instructed everyone to leave the building.

Pensiero said he found "a whole different vantage point" on the tragedy once he entered the street.

"Both towers were really on fire by this point, and many fire and police officers were running toward the fire," he said.

Pensiero said the civil servants

were both courteous and courageous, and they told him to be careful and to avoid the area. From the street, Pensiero walked west toward the Hudson River. As he looked back at the wreckage, Pensiero saw a man jump from one of the towers.

"I guess he made the decision on how he was going to die," Pensiero said.

Pensiero eventually made it to the river where people were piling on to the ferry for free; nobody was checking tickets. On the boat heading for New Jersey, Pensiero and the passengers witnessed the south tower collapse.

Pensiero immediately thought of his friends and colleagues at the Wall Street Journal.

"It was a humongous roar. When I saw that thing fall down, I knew a number of our people were out in the street," Pensiero said. "It never occurred to us that would fall down."

Pensiero managed to find the way to his car and drove to the newsroom, where despite the calamity, he would produce a newspaper.

"As far as my colleagues and I go, our act of defiance for this was to get the paper out. We weren't going to let these bastards stop us," he said.

Pensiero described his emotional state that morning as full of adrenaline. In a three-room training facility, the small team of Wall Street Journal employees attempted to produce a paper.

Despite the tragic events of Sept. 11, 1.6 million of the Wall Street Journal's 1.8 million subscribers received their paper on Wednesday, according to the New York Times.

"We locked up about an hour late, but we still put out a newspa-

per," Pensiero said. "We were happy to do what we were supposed to do, which was to get a paper out. People did some incredible work."

Despite the Wall Street Journal's victory that Tuesday, Pensiero said he felt the effects of the attack.

"I can't get past the enormity of the crime," he said. "(The terrorists) were fiends. It was brilliant. It was too damn good. ... It was a terrible event."

Pensiero said he is extremely grateful just to be alive.

The Wall Street Journal is still operating out of the backup newsroom, which has since been technologically outfitted for extended use. Pensiero said they don't expect to be back in the main office for another two months if they are lucky.

Pensiero said the Wall Street Journal will probably return to its original headquarters, but it could be difficult being "across the street from a mass cemetery."

So, has this event shaken Pensiero's confidence in New York City?

"I think if you let these people think that you're going to dig a hole for yourself and hide, they're going to win," Pensiero said. "There's no place that's perfectly safe in the world. You can live in a hole or go about your business."

Pensiero said he feels most Americans are still in a state of shock. He said he's not used to seeing 110-story buildings collapse before his eyes. Pensiero said while he believes everyone in the country feels upset about this, he was just a little closer to the event.

"Don't lose heart," Pensiero said. "It's a great country, and it will endure this."

Pensiero also urged University students to remain tolerant of Muslims because he said he doesn't believe the Islamic religion supports violence.

"I felt very patriotic about this country long before this happened," Pensiero said. "You hate to sacrifice 6,400 people to make a point."

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