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Published September 11th, 2013 **12th Annual 9/11 Remembrance and Candlelight Vigil Tonight** By Clare Varellas



Many Americans remember exactly how they felt 12 years ago on that fateful Tuesday morning of Sept. 11, 2001 when hijacked passenger airplanes were crashed into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. But despite the impressions that the attacks, the deaths, and the stories of heroes left on many souls, Lafayette resident Jim Minder worries that over time our memories of Sept. 11 will begin to fade, unless we work to keep them alive.

It is for this reason that Minder founded the Lafayette Flag Brigade in 2001, a group of eight that works with dozens of other volunteers to put on an annual 9/11 remembrance and candlelight vigil on El Curtola Bridge in Lafayette.

"The Lafayette Flag Brigade is about never forgetting 9/11, and we try to present people who were eyewitnesses and original source material," said Minder.

It all started on Sept. 11, 2001, when Minder noticed a man waving a flag on the bridge while Minder was driving on the freeway. Minder decided to join him, and over time he and a small group of others organized monthly meetings to wave flags over the bridge at passing drivers.

Photo Doug Kohen

One year later, the first remembrance and candlelight

vigil was held. Every year the event has evolved, so that today it will feature various musical performances, a posting of the colors by Lafayette Boy Scouts, four significant speakers, a vigil prayer by a pastor, and an incredible amount of primary source photos and newspapers from around the country.

One of the event's speakers is Sean Hickey, one of the first responder New York firefighters who worked to rescue people at Ground Zero that day. Another is Stephen Gelman, a Navy Commander for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) who worked with the FBI in counter-terrorism in both the United States and the Middle East following the events of 9/11. Gelman appreciates Lafayette Flag Brigade holding the event and was very willing to speak at it.

"Unfortunately, it's not a pleasant thought to remember," said Gelman. "A lot of people died, and it's good to honor all the first responders. We tend to have very short attention spans in this fast-paced culture, so it's good to [look back]."

First responder firefighter Hickey expresses similar notions, and says that he appreciates people honoring the anniversary of a day that will never leave him.

"What happened to New York happened to the country, and New York is my home," said Hickey. "Every year I long to be with the guys I was with on 9/11, and because I'm so far away, [the people at the event] are like my adopted family. I can be around people that care about what happened. They honor a day that I have to live through 365 days a year."

The event is open to the public and will be held today, Sept. 11, from 4 to 8 p.m. on the El Curtola Bridge at the Hwy 24 overcrossing in Lafayette (take Pleasant Hill Road, south exit to Old Tunnel Road, then to the top of the hill). For information and a map showing the location, visit www.nevereverforget911.com.

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