

The Philadelphia Inquirer

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 7, 2021 | PHILLYINQUIRER | CITY & SUBURBS | C | \$2.95

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REMEMBERING 9/11

Stewards of Hallowed Ground

In tiny Shanksville, where Flight 93 crashed 20 years ago, 9/11 is “part of who we are.”



The Tower of Voices at the Flight 93 National Memorial is a 93-foot-tall musical instrument holding 40 wind chimes, representing the 40 passengers and crew members who fought back against terrorism on 9/11.

By **JULIA TERRUSO and THOMAS FITZGERALD** | Photos by **TOM GRALISH**

SHANKSVILLE, Pa. — Judi Baeckel put up her American flag as usual outside her home the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, and gazed up at the limitless blue sky that aviators call “severe clear.”

“I thought, ‘Oh, it’s going to be such a beautiful, wonderful day today,’ ” she recalled a couple of weeks ago.

Within hours, United Airlines Flight 93, almost belly up and engines screaming, slammed into a grassy field a mile or so from her front door.

A fireball shot skyward, and then a puff of dark black smoke shaped like a mushroom. Houses and buildings shook in the rural town of 245 people. Windows rattled; garage doors popped open.

“There was nothing but a big crater,” said Rick King, former assistant chief of the Shanksville Volunteer Fire Company Station 627, who, with three colleagues, was first on the scene in an engine nicknamed Big Mo.

Small fires flickered here and there. A grove of hemlock trees was burning. The air reeked of kerosene Jet A fuel. There was no one to rescue.

“You never get over it, never,” King said. “I relive it every day. I can see it as if it’s happening now.”

United 93, the fourth weaponized jet in the 9/11 attacks on America, missed its target, believed to be the U.S. Capitol, See **SHANKSVILLE** on A6



Judi Baeckel organized one of the first memorials to the flight crew and passengers and later met some of their families.

“I felt like it’s a cemetery, and somebody had to take care of it because the families weren’t from here. It had to be us.”

Judi Baeckel

Justice Dept. to intervene in Texas

Attorney General Merrick Garland vowed to support abortion clinics “under attack.”

By **Hamza Shaban**
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is exploring “all options” to challenge Texas’ restrictive abortion law, Attorney General Merrick Garland said Monday, as he vowed to provide support to abortion clinics that are “under attack” in the state and to protect those seeking and providing reproductive health services.

The move by the nation’s top law enforcement official comes just days after the Supreme Court refused to block a Texas abortion statute that bans the procedure as early as six weeks into pregnancy with no exceptions for rape or incest. The court’s action stands as the most serious threat to *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark ruling establishing a woman’s right to abortion, in nearly 50 years.

President Joe Biden has sharply criticized the high court’s decision, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) has pledged to call a vote later this month on legislation that would enshrine a woman’s right to an abortion into federal law.

“We will not tolerate violence against those seeking to obtain or provide reproductive health services, physical obstruction or property damage in violation of the FACE Act,” said Garland, referring to the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, a 1994 law that prohibits threats and the obstruction of a person seeking reproductive health services or of providers.

Garland said the Justice Department has reached out to U.S. Attorneys’ offices and FBI field offices in Texas to “discuss our enforcement authorities.”

“The department will provide support from federal law enforcement when an abortion clinic or reproductive health center is under attack,” Garland said.

Garland’s move, like the new law, will probably reverberate See **ABORTION** on A12



Attorney General Merrick Garland is exploring “all options.”

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In Pa., a coming crisis in dementia care



Pat Loughney, right, cared for his wife, Candy, in their home until she went into anaphylactic shock after eating medicated soap. QUINN GLABICKI / Spotlight PA

280,000 residents over 64 suffer from Alzheimer’s, plus 100,000 from related disorders. That will grow.

By **Colin Deppen**
and **Juliette Rihl**
PUBLICSOURCE

Pat Loughney was sleep-deprived and panicked as he dug a partially eaten bar of medicated soap from his wife’s mouth in the narrow confines of their upstairs bathroom. Minutes later, her face swelled and her throat began to close.

At the hospital, Pat explained to the staff that Candy had Alzheimer’s

SPOTLIGHT



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Alzheimer’s disease and that her condition had been deteriorating.

Run-of-the-mill forgetfulness had progressed to a dizzying string of misplaced cars, wandering incidents, cabinet locks being placed inside their home near Pittsburgh, and Pat staying awake at all hours to make sure that his greatest fears weren’t realized.

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Shanksville

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by 18 to 20 minutes — after passengers rebelled and stormed the cockpit to try to wrest the Boeing 757 from al-Qaeda hijackers.

Forty passengers and crew members died in what came to be known as the first battle in the State Department-named “Global War on Terror.”

Within hours of the Flight 93 crash, a pasture full of satellite trucks were beaming Shanksville to every corner of the globe. TV news correspondents were doing stand-ups in residents’ driveways.

“At first you didn’t realize the full impact of what happened,” said Kathy Walker, an area resident whose son would enlist in the Air Force. “That took days and weeks. ... I mean it was very personal because it was here. It was our town. Little Shanksville. ... Who ever heard of Shanksville?”

Two decades on, the last U.S. troops — initially deployed to pursue al-Qaeda leaders suspected of planning the 9/11 attacks — have been pulled out of Afghanistan, and the Taliban has taken over the country from a weakened secular government.

In Shanksville, the swarms of visiting media and tourists are largely gone. The 2,200-acre Flight 93 National Memorial, operated by the National Park Service, is accessible right off Route 30, leaving no need to go through town at all.

The borough has changed in small ways, but not in one big one: Residents here continue to dedicate themselves to honoring the victims of Flight 93 as heroes who laid down their lives to save many more in Washington. They’ve become the stewards and storytellers of hallowed ground.

“I felt like it’s a cemetery, and somebody had to take care of it because the families weren’t from here,” Baeckel said. “It had to be us.”

The ‘ambassador of Shanksville’

Baeckel was working in the Shanksville Post Office the morning of 9/11, and news had already circulated of two planes hitting the World Trade Center. “At least we know we’re safe here,” said a woman who came in to drop off a package.

Minutes later, at 10:03 a.m., Baeckel heard a boom and felt the building shake. Flight 93’s impact would crack the center beam in Brenda Shaffer’s lake-side home and send the ceiling tiles flapping in Mr. O’Connor’s fifth-grade classroom.

“I thought, ‘Oh my God, this is happening all across the United States,’” Baeckel said. “‘If this is happening here, then it must be happening everywhere. We’re under attack.’”

So many people in the aftermath of 9/11 felt helpless. That was true in Shanksville, too. Only here, they could do something.

In the days after the crash, Baeckel and her neighbors set up one of several makeshift memorials around town. She put a 6-foot-long “Shanksville Salutes the Heroes of Flight #93” sign on her lawn, and planted flowers and stuck flags at street intersections. She frequented the crash site to answer questions about the town, earning her the nickname “the ambassador of Shanksville.”

More than 40,000 objects would be collected through 2011 from memorials around town, including a flight attendant’s uniform, teddy bears, a stone angel — and a note from a Capitol employee that read: “Thank you for saving me.”

The first time the families visited, Baeckel gathered townspeople around her lawn sign as the buses passed.

Thinking they shouldn’t just wave, Baeckel put her hand over her heart. Some of the family members on the bus did the same. Others blew her kisses.



Clay Mankamyier places fabric on the huge cross in the Remember Me Rose Garden near the Flight 93 National Memorial. The cross was originally erected at a makeshift memorial during the first weeks after the crash.



Remember Me Rose Garden volunteers work with Mankamyier (rear, on tractor). The garden is designed to be visible to flight crews and passengers from 30,000 feet as they pass through the busy air corridor.

Over time, Baeckel, now 68, has become close friends with the mothers of LeRoy Wilton Homer Jr., the copilot, and Honor Elizabeth Wainio, a 27-year-old passenger.

The maple tree in Baeckel’s yard where the memorial used to be rises high above her house. Her youngest son, a high school student on 9/11, is now town mayor.

“It’s a part of who we are,” Baeckel said. “It always will be.”

A rose garden built on faith

Mary Alice Mankamyier describes her husband, Clay, as bullheaded and willful.

But that tenacity is why the Remember Me Rose Garden, 15 acres on Route 30 honoring the resistance fighters of Flight 93, is nearing completion after a dozen years of struggle that would have wilted most people.

Mankamyier and a band of volunteers had to overcome bureaucratic politics, remove thousands of dumped tires, and clear the land with a borrowed bulldozer — as well as bounce back from a deadly virus that wiped out the hybrid roses bred for the garden.

“I couldn’t let go of the vision,” said Clay, 75, a state trooper who moved back to Shanksville in 1987 for a tranquil retirement.

On a rise at the rear of the property stands a 16-foot cross that was part of an early memorial at the crash site and later discarded by the National Park Ser-

vice as it developed the official Flight 93 memorial.

“Faith is an integral part of the history,” Mankamyier said.

Most famously, Flight 93 passenger Todd Beamer and Lisa Jefferson, a Chicago operator for an air phone company, said the Lord’s Prayer and recited the 23rd Psalm together just before Beamer helped lead the assault to retake the cockpit. Afterward, Jefferson reported hearing Beamer utter the group’s rallying cry: “Let’s roll!”

“If you can’t talk about that, you can’t understand what happened,” Mankamyier said.

Symbols of a variety of religious faiths are displayed in a case in the park’s visitors center along with other tributes people left over the years.

The rose garden forms a compass, 425 deep-pink Julie Andrews tea roses surrounding a fountain bordered by 40 stones, and hundreds of perennial flowers to create the points, with South following the flight path of the doomed jet. It is designed to be visible to flight crews and passengers from 30,000 feet as they pass through the busy air corridor of Southwest Pennsylvania.

The garden, open to all, will offer a place where people can “deflate and decompress” after the heavy emotional load of visiting the national memorial a quarter mile away, Mankamyier said. Gardening help came from a

coal-mining company that donated a bulldozer and driver to clear the field, nurseries that provided flowers, and a volunteer landscaper from Pittsburgh. For his Eagle Scout project, Ryan Cenk, the late son of a volunteer, raised money to buy 15 teak benches along a walking trail.

It turned out you can’t build a rose garden without faith, either.

The high school senior

Annalina Brant’s entire life has unfolded in the footprint of a tragedy that happened before she was born.

Now 18, she has early memories of visiting the chain-link fence at the end of her family’s driveway covered in stuffed animals that surrounded the crash site when she was as young as 4.

Brant has heard her parents’ 9/11 story so many times she can tell it for them: Her dad gazing out at a black plume of smoke on the horizon as her mom, an ear, nose, and throat doctor, rushed to a hospital where she soon realized there would be no patients to help.

She’s grown up with Marine One landing in the field beside her house, and she’s seen Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump before they headed to memorial ceremonies. Friends’ parents and grandparents were volunteer firefighters who responded that day. Todd Beamer’s famous “Let’s roll” is inscribed on

Staff photographs
by Tom Gralish

a rock outside of her high school.

“I think it was good to grow up around it,” Brant said. “Most of the people in my age group ... don’t really learn about it. They know about the twin towers and the Pentagon getting hit, but they didn’t hear much about the plane that landed in the field. I guess because they didn’t think that was as important?”

Living in a town so connected to a national tragedy can also be all-consuming. There was the year the senior class pushed back against having a commencement speaker tied to 9/11, wanting the day to focus on the graduates.

But on the whole, Brant appreciates growing up in a community that celebrates bravery and prioritizes kindness. She likes small-town life. She knows everyone at school — the graduating class this year is 26, down from 52 in 2001 — and everyone has to participate in multiple clubs and sports to keep them going.

For high achievement in calculus, Brant received the 2021 Edward Porter Felt award, named after a 41-year-old computer engineer aboard Flight 93 who called 911 from a rear lavatory and calmly told police the plane had been hijacked.

She is headed to the University of Pittsburgh in fall 2022 to study biochemistry. When she introduces herself to people on campus, she’ll tell them about Shanksville and its significance in history.

“Coming from here,” she said, “We’ve always been taught to have a great deal of respect for it.”

The store owner

Anyone in Shanksville needing groceries, bug spray, hardware, or a thick homemade sandwich has to deal with Rob Snyder, one of his brothers, or their employees.

Snida’s Corner Store is the only option for miles. Two Dollar Generals are about 7 miles away in different directions. The nearest supermarket? A Giant Eagle in Somerset, 9 miles west.

“The store’s doing well,” said Rob, 50, also a deputy superintendent at a state prison and a basketball coach for the Stonycreek-Shanksville Vikings for more than 20 years.

Seven years ago, he and his brothers Jason and Jim bought the venerable Ida’s, which started as “an old general store from See SHANKSVILLE on A7



“Most of the people in my age group ... don’t really learn” about Flight 93 and Shanksville, says Annalina Brant, who grew up with personal stories of 9/11.



Rob Snyder and two of his brothers bought Shanksville’s general store, Ida’s, and created Snida’s, still a gathering place in town. The signs are from the original store.

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the 1940s and '50s," tore it down to create a parking lot, and renovated a former Shanksville firehouse next door.

The downtown market/deli also sells some Flight 93 postcards, souvenir Shanksville T-shirts, heaping cones of locally produced ice cream, and gobs, the Johnstown version of a whoopie pie.

Snida's doesn't get much Flight 93 tourist business these days, but Rob isn't complaining. Without a flood of tourism, the town has been able to stay itself.

Shanksville has also avoided some of the large-scale challenges — high unemployment, opioids, and poverty — that some neighboring postindustrial rural towns have faced. It could have something to do with its place in history, its enduring sense of unity, several residents said.

To Snyder, Shanksville is fine. It's the country he worries about.

"For a moment in time, 9/11 unified the country, and everybody was on the same team for once," said Rob, an Army veteran. That's long over, he said, noting deep mistrust between people and political divisions that seem permanent.

"Politics irritate me," he said. "People are too divided in their causes." He's on the more conservative side, he said, but prefers to "live and let live."

The essence of the town has not changed in the 20 years since everyone came together and acted when Flight 93 went down.

"People still step up to help one another. I love this town," he said.

The mayor

Shanksville Mayor Chris Baeckel, 35, is proud of his mom's role as the original keeper of the Flight 93 flame, but "I was 15 when it happened, and it didn't really sink in right away."

His hometown will forever be linked to 9/11, but the mayor doesn't think the effects are felt day-to-day. "I honestly think it hasn't changed much at all," he said. "It's still the same old small town."

Tourists heading to the memorial don't drive through anymore, he said, but people pulling mud-spattered all-terrain vehicles on trailers often stop to stock up at Snida's — a commercial boost to the town economy. The popular Mountain Ridge ATV Park lies northeast, just off State Route 160.

Chris Baeckel's political career, if it could be called that, began in an offhand way.

He was elected mayor four years ago when his friend the borough secretary suggested local government needed new blood. It was too late to get on the ballot, so his wife, Courtney, created a Facebook page for a write-in campaign. It worked.

Nobody runs outright for the job, which pays \$36 a month, because nobody really wants it, he said. But somebody has to do it, and there's always a write-in winner.

Baeckel serves a population of 224 people — all them white, according to the 2019 census — with a median household income of \$51,563.

Borough Council meetings mostly consist of residents complaining neighbors don't keep their houses in good repair, Baeckel said.

But his job has some of the usual municipal challenges. Many sidewalks are crumbling, and there's only one handicap-accessible curb ramp in town. In a couple of places, small concrete steps provide access to sidewalks from the street level. Roads are pockmarked and could use a repaving.

The mayor has been applying for state and federal grants for repairs since Shanksville's tax base is modest. So far, no luck, but Baeckel plans to keep trying.

He's pretty sure he'll be reelected this fall — by write-in, of course. "I shouldn't have any trouble," he said. "And I don't have to waste any money campaigning."

The history teacher

When J.P. O'Connor, 65, takes his students from Shanksville-Stonycreek Elementary on their annual field trip to the Flight 93 memorial, they get really excited as they recognize faces of firefighters on display.

"They jump all up and down when they see the big pictures: 'That's my grandpop! That's my uncle!'" O'Connor said. "Because they were all first responders that day."

O'Connor, or "Mr. O" as he's affectionately known, is starting his 32nd year of teaching fourth- and fifth-grade U.S. history, including a two-week lesson on 9/11 and Shanksville.

Part of his lesson is telling his kids about what happened in his own classroom that day.

O'Connor had put on CNN for students to watch what was unfolding in New York when he



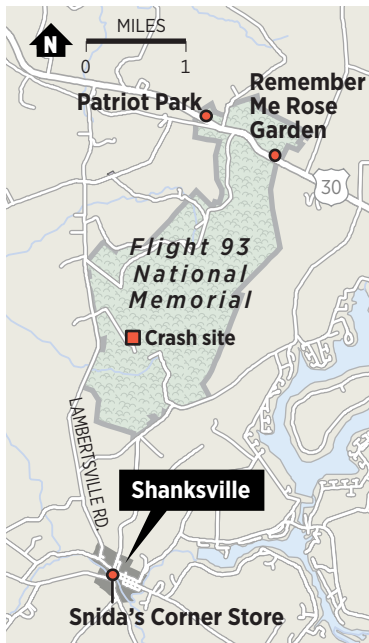
Downtown Shanksville, a tiny borough in Somerset County, lost its obscurity 20 years ago when United Airlines Flight 93 crashed into a former coal field nearby.



"I honestly think it hasn't changed much at all," says Shanksville Mayor Chris Baeckel. "It's still the same old small town."



J.P. O'Connor — "Mr. O" — pauses in a corner of his classroom while getting ready for the new school year at Shanksville-Stonycreek Elementary. He teaches U.S. history to fourth and fifth graders.



JOHN DUCHENSKIE / Staff Artist

heard a loud boom. He stepped outside and saw a huge black cloud of smoke that looked as if it were coming from the playground. The next several hours became about keeping the kids calm as parents arrived to pick them up amid sirens blaring outside. O'Connor put on *Free Willy*.

O'Connor also teaches stu-

dents about the passengers and crew. After 20 years, he knows a lot about them. There were both a retired pilot and an air traffic controller on board. He believes with a little more time, they could have taken back and landed the plane.

Another part of the lesson is about the national outpouring of

“That hour and 13 minutes ... changed the world forever. It changed the way you and I and everyone in the world lives. ... Everyone in the world should teach it. That's what I believe.”

J.P. O'Connor

attention on Shanksville. In that first year, the school was inundated with gifts — lots of cards and teddy bears. A school from Hawaii sent leis. A Washington state Native American tribe sent a totem pole.

"America in general ... felt a part of this and they all wanted to do something to help out," O'Connor said.

After three decades of teaching, O'Connor observes that 9- and 10-year-olds are more attached to their phones now. He also hears more political opinions than he used to.

He thinks Flight 93 teaches important lessons about "courage, sacrifice, and unity" and worries who will teach it when he retires

in two years.

"That hour and 13 minutes ... changed the world forever," O'Connor said. "It changed the way you and I and everyone in the world lives. ... Everyone in the world should teach it. That's what I believe."

The man who lived at the point of impact

Within an hour or so of Flight 93 going down, Barry Hoover, now 55, rushed to the lane leading to his stone bungalow in the woods a few hundred feet from the crater, hoping to rescue his cat, Woodie. It was chaos, the roads packed with emergency vehicles and cars.

Police would not let him enter. He begged a local township officer to escort him. "You've got three minutes."

He called for the cat, but it was gone. The house had been knocked off its foundation, its windows shattered and doors blown open. "I was looking up at the sky" through holes punched in the roof, Hoover said.

He choked up and could not speak in a recent interview, declining to describe other things he saw that day.

Hoover not only lost his idyllic home, close to the family cottage where he spent much of his childhood, he also lost his moorings in some ways. He's refused offers to speak publicly about 9/11 for 20 years.

He talked of scrambling over hills of coal-mining spoils and exploring the woods as a kid. "I'd find fossils with ferns stamped right into them," he said.

Even if he had been able to go back there to live, Hoover said he couldn't do it.

"I was a dirt biker. I was a hunter. I couldn't shoot a gun back there," Hoover said. "I couldn't start a dirt bike. You don't ride off-road motorcycles through a cemetery."

And he didn't want tourists someday to overhear him "cussin' at my lawn mower," either.

He eventually sold the property to the Park Service and moved on, but for years, he had to pay taxes on the land and empty house, and he was not able to borrow against it.

Yet Hoover knows Flight 93 is much bigger than he is. "It's about those folks that gave up their lives for the good of all," he said. He doesn't blame the crash for any of the choices he made later.

A couple of weeks after the crash, Hoover found Woodie when he went back to retrieve belongings. The dazed cat had emerged from hiding and was being fed by state troopers and FBI agents.

Husband-and-wife Flight 93 ambassadors

Chuck and Jayne Wagner answered the town calling early.

They became ambassadors at the community's impromptu Flight 93 memorial right away, taking shifts in all seasons to meet those who came with questions or to reflect, pray, and leave gifts and notes on plywood boards and a chain-link fence that bordered the crash site.

Jayne Wagner remembers freezing on winter days, ducking into her car occasionally between greeting visitors with three-ring binders of information and photos — until visiting National Park Service staffers from Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland took pity and shipped a surplus lifeguard

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shack to the Shanksville ambassadors.

“They thought we needed something to get out of the elements,” Chuck Wagner, 72, said. Added Jayne: “Winters here are not nice.”

The volunteers collected money to put a propane heater in it, stayed toasty in cold months and out of the rain in warmer ones, and invited visitors to sign a guest book inside.

Chuck, an amateur photographer, wrote two books based on his pictures from the Flight 93 site: *Reflections From the Temporary Memorial*, a detailed account of things ordinary people brought there from right after the crash to 2011, and *Reflections From the Memorial*, with photos illustrating quotes from family members of the passengers and crew.

For years, the Wagners had to cram ambassador shifts into weekends. Jayne, 73, was a full-time ICU nurse in Johnstown, and Chuck operated heavy equipment and maintained a nearby church camp.

Occasionally, telling the Flight 93 story meant staying calm when irate people tried to argue with them, saying the military shot the jet down or pushing other theories.

“We gave our own talk and then let them vent,” Chuck said. “I’d say, ‘That’s interesting’ and let it drop there.” Most people didn’t do that, but the work could be draining, he said, especially soon after the attacks when emotions were raw.

“I’d see people crying, and it would just touch my heart,” he said. “It was a challenge to keep going at times, but we wanted to be there.”

They still volunteer, supplementing the work of Park Service rangers. Last year President Donald Trump name-checked the Wagners in a speech at the national memorial, mentioning Chuck’s work helping the FBI sift dirt for evidence.

“It’s been fulfilling to document it and bring it all together for future generations,” Chuck said.

The airman’s mom

Every fall brings two difficult anniversaries for Kathy Hause Walker. This September is 20 years since Flight 93 crashed a few



Kathy Hause Walker’s son enlisted in the Air Force and died in Iraq. She has channeled her grief into Patriot Park, a new memorial across from the entrance to the Flight 93 memorial to honor more than 7,000 U.S. military members who died during the global war related to the 9/11 attacks.

miles from her home in Stoystown, and October is 13 years since her son died while deployed in the war that began on 9/11.

Brian Hause was 23 when he enlisted in the Air Force. He had a wife and two kids and wanted a steady way to support them. He was also deeply affected by Flight 93 crashing so near his home, Walker said. He enlisted in December 2001 and served in Kuwait and then Iraq.

“He took it personally that our little hometown was attacked,” Walker said.

Hause was Walker’s only child. He loved to fish, hunt, and strum his acoustic guitar. His kids were 4 and 7 when he died in 2008 of a medical emergency related to his heart.

Less than two years after his death, Walker’s husband died of a heart attack.

Walker has channeled some of

her grief into Patriot Park, a new memorial she’s helping to create across from the entrance to the Flight 93 memorial to honor more than 7,000 members of the U.S. military who died during the global war related to the 9/11 attacks.

Hause’s story will be displayed there, alongside tributes to others who deployed from Somerset County but never returned home.

Memorializing her son is complicated by the fact that he didn’t die in combat.

“Sometimes I feel almost guilty, like ... I don’t have a Purple Heart for my son. He died from something weird with his heart,” Walker said. “People want to hear The Story. And I don’t have The Story. I have the story that my baby went to serve, and he didn’t come back alive.”

For Randy Musser, who heads the Patriot Park project, the response to his friend Walker is simple. Her son “was there doing a job,” Musser said. “He’s a hero.”

Musser, a civil engineer, whose family has been in Shanksville since the 1780s, owns the land across from the Flight 93 National Memorial and thought the space beneath the skies where 40 people fought back against terrorism was the perfect place to pay tribute to fallen military men and women who followed.

Opening the park this year feels particularly significant as the United States has fully withdrawn troops from Afghanistan. “I can’t imagine how those men and women who served there feel,” Musser said. “They did a wonderful job in a very difficult situation and ... part of what I want to do here is to say thanks.”

On a recent Monday, Musser and Walker spent the afternoon placing little American flags in a field to represent each member of the military who died in war related to the 9/11 attacks — the longest conflict in American history.

Walker worked alongside her second husband, Pat Walker. She hadn’t planned to remarry until she met him on a mission trip. She’d been volunteering every year on the anniversary of her son’s death.

There’s comfort, even joy, both Walker and Musser agreed, in channeling sadness into service. It’s what residents in Shanksville have been doing for 20 years.

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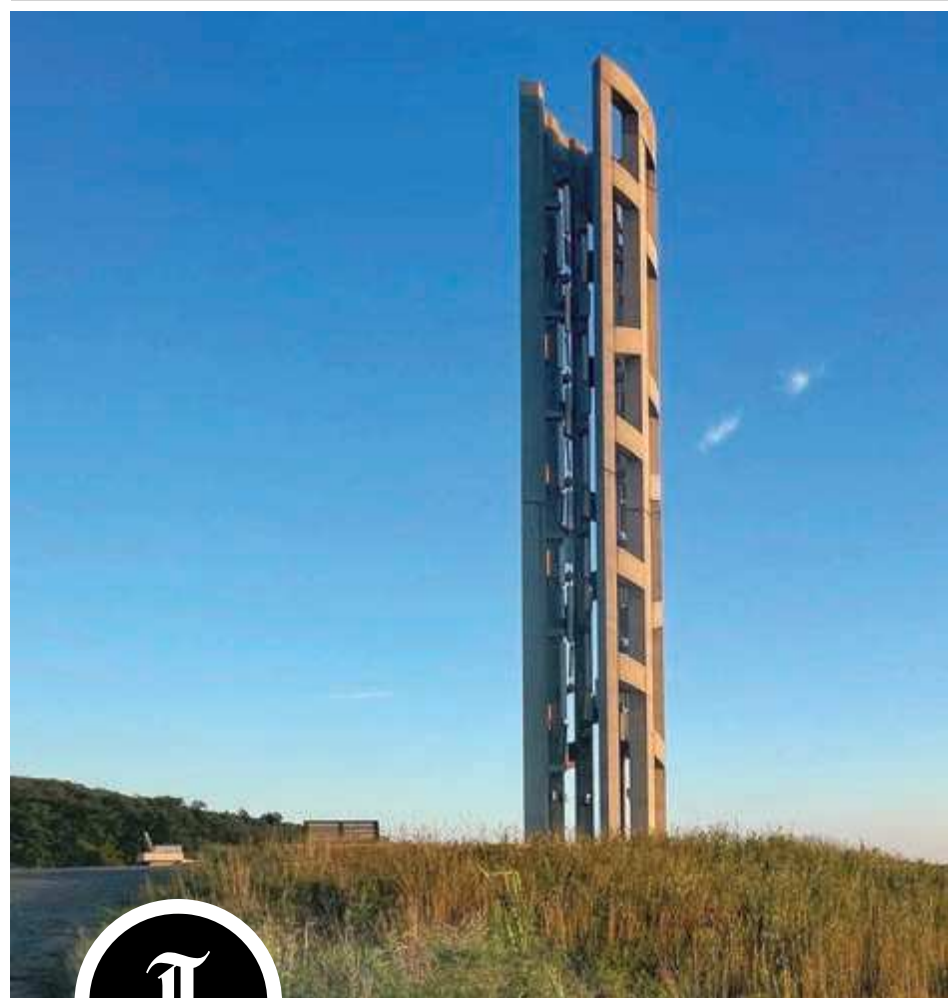
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Flight 93 National Memorial Tower of Voices

A conversation with Architect Paul Murdoch moderated by Inquirer digital editor Tommy Rowan.

Sept 8 | 12:00 PM

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