

Remembering 9/11/01

Written by LeiLani Ochoada

Most people will always remember where they were and what they were doing when they first learned about the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. In recognition of the upcoming 11th anniversary of these tragic events, three local heroes shared their first-hand experiences and the important roles they played on that day.

Jimmy Brown of Winter Garden



Jimmy Brown of Winter Garden served as a member of the New York City Police Department for nine years.

After nine years with the New York City Police Department,

Through the station's open doors, Brown, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, heard the first airplane

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"I was able to tell that it was very large, very close, very low and traveling very fast," said Brown, now a V

Within seconds, he watched as American Airlines Flight 11 hit the WTC's north tower at 466 miles per h

"I could feel the force of the impact resonate through my body," he said. "It was like a concussion grenad

Engine 10/Ladder 10 were the first FDNY units to respond to the terrorist attacks. Upon arrival, first resp

"Most of the glass windows that were inches thick were blown out and broken," Brown said. "The marbl

"Adding to the chaotic atmosphere were the constant crashing sounds and breaking glass. All I could fo

Each carrying more than 100 pounds of gear and equipment, Brown and his fellow firefighters entered th

"Once inside the stairwell, the chaos that was present in the lobby disappears," he said. "The flow of civi

Brown's group made it to about the 23rd floor when the south tower fell.

"Everything changed," he said. "We began to feel this incredible rumbling, and the floor began to sway le

The group decided unanimously to evacuate. Navigating through debris, blocked stairwells, broken pipe

"It sounded like a freight train starting out slowly from far away and getting faster as it neared," he said. "

As Brown braced himself against 6 WTC, falling wreckage and debris quickly and painfully buried him up

"With each piece of debris that impacted me directly, it felt as though each was larger and hurt more tha

Hit first at 8:46 a.m., the north tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m. The south tower was hit at 9:03 a.m. and co



Winter Garden resident Jimmy Brown, former New York police officer and firefighter; Winter Garden Fire

“I now found myself on my back, enveloped by this massive cloud and a mouthful of powdered dust,” Br

As the dust settled, Brown saw he was surrounded by pockets of fire, rubble, beams, concrete slabs, pa

“Nothing in the building appears to be familiar or recognizable as an office,” he said. “The scene is unbe

After managing to get up and assisting a trapped civilian, Brown eventually made his way to a nearby co

“It was the only time I got that relief that he was OK,” Rodriguez said.

Today, Brown works at the Orange County Sheriff’s Office, and the couple have two children, Andrew, 5

Diagnosed with acute stress disorder after the attacks, Brown worked with the National Institute of Ment

Last year, he and three other local men drove to New York to bring back a 700-pound steel I-beam from

“When you forget history, you tend to repeat it,” Brown said, about the importance of remembering the a

Eli Muniz of Winter Garden

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Retired pilot and U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Dan Fanelli of Windermere piloted a Boeing 727 heading to Ronald

The morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Eli Muniz had the day off from his job as a New York City Transit Police

Shortly after dropping his now-adult daughter, Stephanie, at school, he received a call to report for duty

“As I got ready to leave, my wife gave me a hug goodbye,” he said of Nancy Muniz, his wife of now 27 y

Amazed at the traffic congestion and droves of people exiting the city on foot over the Brooklyn Bridge, I

One particular scene made a distinct impression on Muniz, a six-year veteran of the NYPD.

“There was a senior officer, an old-timer, breaking down in the locker room and just crying,” said Muniz,

“Just walking past Broadway, we were covered in dust from head to toe. Every night my uniform smelled

Muniz, who grew up in Brooklyn, also encountered a jet engine that had fallen in front of a Burger King r

“As crazy as New York is, that just didn’t belong,” he said. “It was weird, the weirdest feeling in the world

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For Muniz, one of the most difficult moments came days later, when NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly...
For about two weeks, Muniz worked 12-hour shifts and twice helped sort through the wreckage in a bucket...
“Going through the debris — that was pretty rough,” he said. “We had to identify anything that would be...
Today, Muniz works in the Orange County Sheriff’s Office as an investigative analyst. He hopes that Am...
“It’s important that we keep a memory of the fallen that passed away there,” he said. “Life is precious. Li...
“I believe the 9/11 first responders showed us the bravery exhibited by firemen/women, police, paramed...

Dan Fanelli of Windermere



Windermere resident and former congressional candidate Dan Fanelli (right) meets with Sen. Marco Ruben...

As an airline captain of a Boeing 727 on Sept. 11, 2001, Dan Fanelli had already completed an early morning flight...
“It started off as a beautiful day to be flying,” recalled the longtime Windermere resident. “It was a cool a...

His flight took off as planned, and he was well into the air when he learned that the New York Air Route...

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"I can only recall one other time New York Center closed its airspace," Fanelli said. "It was years before,

Shortly after he began descending into Washington National, Fanelli got word that a plane had crashed

"You just don't fly into that building," he said. "I said a silent prayer to God, 'Please let this not be terrorism

Moments later, air traffic control personnel reported that another plane had hit a second tower at the WT

"I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, this was terrorism," he said. "I knew we were at risk. I went straight

Fanelli, now retired after 20 years as a Northwest Airlines pilot, is also a retired lieutenant commander a

"I've always felt we could survive anything with people like [those who have graduated from the U.S. Na

Fanelli, who is also a former U.S. House of Representatives candidate who ran for Florida's 8th congress

Terrorism is a very different situation from hijacking, which is addressed in commercial airline training.

"Hijackers want to get off and get their money or whatever their demands are," Fanelli said. "Terrorists a

The seasoned pilot landed his plane at Washington Dulles International Airport within moments of the th

"It is a day, as long as I live, I will never forget," said Fanelli, who spoke at the Washington Monument o

"It just makes it clearer how lucky we are to live in this country," Fanelli said. "We have to take care of ou
