

Memorial will interpret history of Sept. 11

(Editor's Note: John J. Reynolds of Alexandria, Va. and the chairman of the Flight 93 National Memorial Federal Advisory Commission, visited the Daily American to discuss a variety of issues with Vicki Rock, staff writer, and Brian Whipkey, editor, for this feature.)

Q: What has it been like being chairman of the advisory commission?

A: Oh, the first reaction is marvelous. How could you imagine being asked as just a citizen? You know, I wasn't from here, and I wasn't, I'm not a family member. I'm nothing more than a citizen of the United States, and to be asked to chair a commission to honor people who are heroes to the United States of America is, it's, I don't know how to describe it except it's one of the most responsible things I've ever done. It's one of the happiest things I've ever done. It's serious. It's marvelous.

Q: How much money has been raised for the memorial and what is the goal?

A: The goal is \$30 million. I don't know exactly how much money has been raised, but it's in excess of \$11 million and might be in excess of \$12 million at this point, but I am not certain.

Q: Are you pleased with the progress of the fundraising?

A: Yes, I am pleased with the progress of the fundraising, and at the same time I think it's important to recognize that at the end of our original contract and at the urging of the contractors, I think we took a very responsible action, I think as anybody should at the end of two years of a fundraising effort no matter what it is and say, well, have we reached out to all the right kinds of folks? What's been the most successful? What's not quite as successful? How should we change this? And we did.

Q: Have most of the donations come from individuals, organizations, businesses?

A: I'm going to answer this so it's most in terms of dollars and most in terms of numbers. In terms of numbers of donors, by a huge percentage, most of the donations have come from individuals. Of course, as with any campaign, there are a few donations that are a lot of money.

Q: Not too many people could sit down and write you a check for a million dollars.

A: No, but it's been amazing to see the number of people who will write checks for \$93 or for \$150. We've actually even before this, the changeover, we were sort of amazed at the direct mail campaign. People would not just respond with the minimum on the checked box. I take a look at all my direct mail, those things that I receive, and I go, well, gee, I like this one, I think I'll check the first box. We've been amazed at how many people didn't check a box but wrote a bigger check and sent it in. I don't know the percentage, but the direct mail people say it's amazingly high.

Q: How is the process of buying the land coming along?

A: It's much better, with, boy, I don't know how, what's the best way to express this. With huge gratitude and admiration for the families and Patrick White in particular who has made it his personal commitment to get to know the people that own the land and can negotiate in good faith with them, and the families of course were smart enough to keep the million dollars they got from Universal so they could have the flexibility to do whatever was necessary, whether it was buy land or something else, prior to the time the federal government had land acquisition money in. Patrick has just been, he's just been so, gosh, quietly wonderful and respectful, and so one at a time he talks to folks, and you know, there are some that have happened and some that are more difficult. It's moving along much better than it was even six months ago.

Q: We know you're interested in interpretive planning. Please talk about it in relation to the memorial.

A: How did you know that? [laughs] Did you really? This goes back to my career with the park service and way, way early on in my career, like back in the late 60s, I was — this has nothing to do with this story except background — the

Reynolds has worldly experience

John J. Reynolds of Alexandria, Va. is the chairman of the Flight 93 National Memorial Federal Advisory Commission.

The commission has a three-part mission for the permanent memorial for United Flight 93 in Stonycreek Township. The three parts include recommending a boundary; a memorial design, and a management plan.

He earned a master's degree in landscape architecture in June 1996 from the State University College of Forestry at Syracuse University. He also holds a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from Iowa State University in June 1964.

His career with the National Park Service has included being the deputy director of the service from 1993-1996 in Washington, D.C. and regional director of the Pacific West region in San Francisco, Calif., from 1997 to 2002. He has also served in various supervisory roles at National Parks in Denver, Colo.; North Cascades National Park in Sedro Woolley, Wash., and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation in California.

He also worked as a landscape architect for the service in various locations including Lakewood, Colo.; San Francisco, Calif.; Anchorage, Alaska; Washington,



Staff photo by Brian Whipkey

John J. Reynolds

D.C. and Philadelphia.

Reynolds has had official foreign assignments from 1982 to present in Saudi Arabia, Poland, Venezuela, India, Russia, England, Belgium, Japan, Israel, Bahamas, and Germany.

From 1995-2001 he represented the United States as head of delegation or member of delegation for the World Heritage Committee in Paris, France, Nales, Italy; Kyoto, Japan; Merida, Mexico; and Berlin, Germany.

park service had a very strong interpretive planning function at that time, a very imaginative group of folks. They were a very prominent part of what happened in parks. We had a lot of new parks happening in those days, and so it was really critical, and I was fortunate enough, I was a park planner but I wasn't an interpretive planner, but there was a program started which the head of the interpretive planning center thought it would be a really good idea if some park planners understood interpretive planning. It seems like a no-brainer, you know, when you're not doing it, it's a great step forward. And I got picked to be one of the ones that was trained, and so I got to be directly exposed to the idea of trying to connect people to a park with its stories and to inspire a response in people as a result of that, and of course I didn't stay in that part of the profession. I went on and continued to do park planning, but it set in me this understanding of one of the real long-term purposes of the national park is to continue to try to connect Americans and others who come with why Congress chose that as one of the 391 most important places in the country's heritage to keep for all time. So you're right, I've been quietly vocal with Joanne and others that really sitting down and seriously thinking through within the park service and with the rest of the partners, in particular with the families, to figure out how and hopefully on what kind of would the total breadth of how we connect this place to Americans and to visitors from outside of America, how do we connect this place. How do we connect it on a level that it is a cemetery, it's a sacred burial ground for 40 people. In some ways it's a national cemetery. And sort of maybe all the way at the other end, is it possible to use this place and the reverence and the aura for this place in its connection to what happened on Sept. 11, 2001, as a way to inspire people to maybe even think at the college level about what is it we have to do in a modern, evolving society to protect ourselves from terrorism? How do we do these things? How do we relate to the rest of the world? And if it can be sort of an impetus to those two things and whatever there is in between as opposed to just having some signs out there saying, you know, this was the direction the plane went and this is where it crashed, all of which is important too, but to gain more from an intellectual and an inspirational viewpoint. If you think of Concord and Lexington, you know, you can go there and start thinking about, you know, geez, what did the Revolution mean? I think this place can be the place that the nation comes and says, wow, 200 years ago, it happened here. So I think it's really important to think all that through with a wide variety of people and just take the time to do it.

Q: I think the Flight 93 location is an ideal place to have an interpretive center because of all the resources that are available there. You think about, like in

Washington, D.C., the secrecy of the Pentagon building, in New York City, the limited space. In Stonycreek Township we have this huge area where we can actually talk about what happened on September 11 across the country. Is that what you're envisioning, is that the whole country will learn about Sept. 11 in Stonycreek Township?

A: I think that should be the opportunity that's available out there. It's sort of frightening to think that everybody would descend on the place, but people absolutely want to understand. I hope they do, I hope they do come, and if — you know, I have these crazy ideas which I'm sure are crazy ideas but what if a university someplace associated itself with the park and maybe students studied what leads to terrorism and why the United States was terrorized, and then they come there. Gosh, I would urge them to come there, like Gettysburg, you know. People going through military training, War College and so on, still come to Gettysburg to study there. And maybe people can come here. Maybe that can happen, and maybe it can be used in textbooks and for discussion — I'll be too old to think much about this but how do you use it virtually? I mean, you can almost transport a place in somebody's vision and mind somewhere else and start to use it. And then you mention this place and that, I think that, you know, like got this glimmer in your head and your eyes that not only could they come there, but it's this, it's this, it's like some higher being chose that location, because when you're there, you're not anywhere else. There's nothing else bothering you. You're engulfed by it, and you can have, your whole being can immerse itself in that place. It's just — to go back to my interpretive planning days, you would die to have a location like that to be able to interpret something as serious as this is.

Q: The county is working on a Flight 93 Corridor study of Somerset County and trying to prepare for the future of when the memorial is built. What types of things would you like to see? What expectations do you have from Somerset County residents or comments from the past five years on dealing with Somerset County residents about the future of the memorial?

A: What I've gotten most out of that study going on that sort of delights me is that, you know, it's so easy to say, well, there ought to be zoning or there ought to be government control of what happened there and so on, and I think that's, you know, that's not the most important thing. I think the important thing is that Somerset County and the folks in the local communities sit down and they think about what it is they would like to see, how it might impact them, how they'd like to go about dealing with those things, how they'd like to watch it happen, and they've internalized that. From what I've been

told about the study, you know, it's really true. People are, and government organizations are internalizing it and treating it as a part of how they see the county's future and the local area's future out there as opposed to just saying the government ought to come in and do this and do that, which sometimes it's appropriate but it sure is a lot more appropriate for people to really think through and arrive at common beliefs and act on their common beliefs as opposed to sort of government strictures. I never know the right words for these kinds of things, but I'm impressed that with the seriousness that the people have addressed that. There's been a huge amount of thought and obviously people talk about it more than when they're just at meetings, because otherwise they wouldn't come to the meetings and talk like they do, I'm very impressed with, I'm very impressed with, I'm very impressed with how the people here are really being people who care about their future and the future of where they live, which they should, I mean, what a beautiful place.

Q: There are a few people who continue to think the memorial design has an Islamic symbol in it. What are your comments on that and the future of the appearance of the memorial?

A: Thanks for asking the question, because it's one I think about a lot. You know, I think that it's easy for people to take a lot of different things and say, well, gee, I can imagine it's this. I was thinking over the last few days, I thought about a cathedral, and sort of commonly we think of a cathedral as a Gothic-like structure and it's big and it's probably usually stone, and you know, that's not what defines a cathedral. A cathedral could be any building that has a cathedra, a bishop's chair, in it. It has to have a bishop and a bishop's chair. It has to be designated, and there's lots of places that people go see in Europe that probably we all walk away from thinking that was a cathedral and it's not, it's just a big, beautiful stone church. And so, you know, it's the intent of the people who are involved with that place I think that that drives, and I think that's the case here, and I think the thing that makes the most upset and the most concerned about this is the imposition of other people who haven't been involved whatsoever, of what they see, to overtake the intent of the people who have thoughtfully gone through the creation of this whole thing, and so I have a lot of angst about not valuing uppermost the intents of the people that created it, in this case I would say mostly the families and the architect and the other partners as well. If this was not a design that pleased the families and made them feel like they and their loved ones were embraced and taken care of appropriately and presented to the future appropriately, then they wouldn't have approved of the design. I've also thought about the Washington Monument. I mean, since 9/11 — you

know, the Washington Monument, as you well know, sticks straight up out of the ground, and security around the Washington Monument was an issue, actually an issue before 9/11, but it became a huge issue after 9/11, and the resulting design is a circular wall. It stands about this high, but it's, you're not going to drive a tank or a truck up over it very quickly or easily. It's granite and if you know anything at all about what's behind and below the wall, it's big and it's thick and — you start thinking, well, gee, you know when the sun hits the angle as it hits the Washington Monument at the right time of day, it's going to point to a place on that circle. Is that a response to protecting the Washington monument, an Islamic response? No, absolutely not. It's a response to how the original designers of the Washington Monument expected that place to be seen given the realities of today and nothing more. And it's, gosh, if you haven't been there recently, the completed project is just beautiful. It's so understated that you just have no idea of what it is. So I think that the people who are inventing these theories have the right to do so, but I don't think they should overtake what the families and the designer and the architect have envisioned as the place to embrace what Flight 93 really is.

Q: Is there anything else about your work on the memorial, the families, Somerset County, that you'd like to talk about that we didn't ask you?

A: Yes, there is. It's personal, but it's not the kind of thing that I mind at all talking about because it's one of the most important in my life. When I was interviewed to be on the commission, I lived in California at the time, and they offered to interview me by phone, and I thought, you know, what kind of an insult to the families would it be if you didn't interview personally. So I came out and went to the memorial and I got lost and was almost late to my interview. I can't remember what month it was, but it was cold, it was a cold rain, so I came out. I parked in front of the attorney's office up here and went in and fortunately I was 10 minutes early, and then the rest of the folks invited me in, and there were three family members. There was a table about this size, and there were two family members here and somebody else there, Dan Rullo down at the end, and the guy from the Gettysburg Foundation over here, and another family member right here, and Dan started the meeting. I haven't forgotten the question, by the way. And then Ben Wainio and Paula — Nacke's not her last name now, but it was, it was her maiden name — ended up asking most of the questions, and so sort of unconsciously I turned like this, so you're sitting not there but here, but so my back is almost to you, and you're Sandy Felt, and so I'm here and at one point Ben started to cry, and the meeting slowed down, and I was just incredibly impressed by the fact that it didn't stop. People showed deep, deep, terrifying emotion, and I thought, this is the most incredibly civilized way to approach life. You just slow down, Paula put her arm around him, and it was an incredibly respectful time. And so it was emotional. So I'm sitting there like this and all of a sudden, Sandy was just sort of in my vision, and I've sort of not remembered that she's an equal family member, and I'm not sitting like this, I'm sitting like this, and said — and this was the most appropriate question of the whole day — she said, Mr. Reynolds, you're not a family member and you're not from Somerset County. Why should you be considered for this commission? And I remember thinking, oh my God, and then second is, how do I answer this question and at the same time it went through my head, this is the most perfect right question, and if I don't answer it, they shouldn't let me be on this commission. And yet I knew the answer and said, I was a citizen, I am a citizen of the United States of America. This affects every citizen and the future of the United States and it affects all of us. If I can have any tiny bit to do with representing American citizens, even though I had no other connection, then I would like very much to do that. And that's basically what I said. It would be an honor to be asked to be a member of the commission.