

The impact of Flight 93 is felt in various ways

By Bruce A. Love

The events of September 11, 2001 changed many lives in many ways. For surviving family members of that tragedy, it meant that loved ones would never return home. For many Americans, the realization that our nation's defenses are not impenetrable suddenly became frighteningly clear. For the quiet town of Shanksville, the crash of Flight 93 meant that the town would be thrust into the national spotlight, and its future would be forever changed by the heroic actions of the forty passengers and crew onboard the airliner. For unscrupulous opportunists, Flight 93 represents a potential for financial gain.

Shortly after the tragedies of 9/11, I was shocked to see a privately owned Flight 93 touring van parked outside of a local marketplace. I am always amazed, and usually impressed, with the ingenuity and entrepreneurial initiative of American business owners, but this was a perfectly crass example of how low some people will stoop to make a buck. However, in the aftermath of the crash of Flight 93, it has become obvious that many careers and businesses have been, or will be, launched by the events of 9/11.

In an outpouring of sympathy, love, respect and gratitude, families, friends and strangers visited the crash site in the days, weeks, and months following the tragedy. They left pictures, cards, stuffed animals and other expressions of their feelings, which quickly accumulated in an informal heartfelt tribute to the special people who perished onboard Flight 93. Some visitors recognized the need to do something more and found ways to raise funds to assist surviving family members. Others in government decided a National Park was in order, and established a "Design Competition" to determine the ultimate formal expression of gratitude from the citizens of the United States.

I felt compelled to submit a design, which I developed over several months and which reflected personal feelings inspired by those onboard Flight 93. My design did not look like the Great Wall of China, an oversized keyboard, or a pillbox propped up on a sloping hillside. Given all of the inspirational designs submitted, I do not

fully understand the concepts chosen for future consideration, but each of us was moved in unique ways by the events of that day. Those who participated in the design process, and those who view these designs, have an opportunity to further explore and share personal feelings about that day. If you have a chance, visit Somerset and view the more than 1,000 designs submitted. If you are unable to visit the display before it is removed at the end of the month, view these ideas online at: www.flight93memorialproject.org.

From the beginning, I felt uncomfortable with the terms, "contest" and "competition." These terms are usually reserved for sporting events and games of chance, and did not seem appropriate for describing the formal process of selecting a permanent design for the memorial expression. The contest-like atmosphere was further promoted with the announcement that five \$25,000 monetary awards would be given to each of the finalists whose designs were selected for consideration.

I would like to believe that each "competitor," including myself, was motivated by the honor of participating in the process, but wonder whether the cash awards may have helped inspire some of us. I believe, in retrospect, that the \$25,000 honorarium was an unnecessary complication in the process -- thinking instead that the privilege of participating in this worthy cause is its own reward. The monetary aspect caused me to think of those who use the tragedy of others for their own personal gain, such as those that sell Flight 93 shuttle tours, high-rise parachutes, and Anthrax survival kits.

There are many positive outcomes and stories that have emerged since the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Locally, Somerset County stands to gain economically as tourism receives a boost. But before these things take place, visit the future site of the new National Park, and experience the informal memorial and surroundings before they are changed forever by whatever design is ultimately selected to express our Nation's gratitude. It is an emotionally moving and thought provoking experience.

Love Consulting
600 Oakmont Place
Roaring Spring, PA 16673
814-224-2651

articles@loveconsulting.com

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