

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

September 11, 2002

Remembering and Reflecting

There has been much discussion in the press about the appropriate recognition of the anniversary of last year's terrorist attacks on America. My assessment of our region's ceremonies is that we did it just right. This is the way the community remembered, according to the events in which I participated.

The first event was actually held on September 10th. It was the dedication of a new flagpole at the Yeshiva on Converse Street. Scheduled during the days of reflection before Yom Kippur as well as the eve of the terrorist anniversary, its significance was emphasized by both events. Each child held an American flag, and after appropriate speeches and music, the Stars and Stripes were raised in front of the school. War veterans reminded us of the nation's military history and, in honoring the flag at that symbolic time the whole school community was quietly remembering September 11th, 2001.

The morning of the eleventh, Springfield opened its remembrances with a Red Cross breakfast that recognized local heroes for their actions during the past year, reminding us all on a somber day that heroism occurs daily when our neighbors react in crises. That event was followed by a service sponsored by the city's emergency services.

Longmeadow next held a service on the Green with simple remarks by Chief Eric Madison of the Fire Department, Chief of Police Richard Marchese and a prayer by Larry Provenzano, Fire Department Chaplain. It was a small service open to all and attended by a cross-section of town residents. One mother attended with her third grade daughter in order to give her the memory of the occasion, though nearby Center School had decided not to have the children attend. We assembled on the Green in bright sunlight, but as the service began, clouds filled the sky and the wind blew in great gusts. It seemed like appropriate recognition of the solemnity of the day from the heavens.

Monson held the next service at 5:00, a commemoration service arranged by the town's library. The weather had continued to worsen as the day went by, and by that the wind was even stronger and rain had begun to fall. Workers who had reported to Ground Zero for the recovery efforts were honored, as were townspeople who were called to active duty in the military response that followed.

By the time I headed from Monson to East Longmeadow, the wind had knocked down a large tree, blocking a road and forcing me to take a long detour to find another route around the mountain. The East Longmeadow service was well underway when I arrived, but I was able to participate in the symbolic candle lighting at its end. As you would expect from the description of the weather, the only candles that stayed lit were those in hurricane glasses to protect them from the wind. The rain had stopped, however. The hardiest candles maintained their flame, and a large number of residents gained strength from the unity of their town assembly. The wind continued to blow, but it had blown the rain away, and the moon shone down on the candles of hope.

I saw scattered minutes of television coverage throughout the day. I'm glad to have seen the presidential appearances at the three crash sites, and I appreciate the reminders of last year that came from seeing film footage of the day. But I am grateful that most of my day was spent with the people of Longmeadow and the other towns, remembering and reflecting.