

Volunteers crucial to Flight 93

By JANE STUECKEMANN jstueckemann@dailyamerican.com

Vehicles with license plates from states across the country can often be found in the Flight 93 National Memorial parking lot.

The memorial has over 400,000 visitors per year.

The work of the Friends of Flight 93 nonprofit organization will likely help to keep them coming.

There are over 300 members of the organization, excluding volunteers.

“Friends of Flight 93 works with the National Park Service. We raise resources, volunteers, do fundraising and help with educational fundraising here,” said Brooke Neel, developmental assistant for the organization.

“It’s really just anything we can do to keep the story alive for Flight 93.”

Neel said one of the goals she has is to continue to plan events and keep people coming back to the memorial because the story of what happened is still relevant today.

“This is a current event. This is the only national park that commemorates a 21st century national and worldwide historic event. To see the park developed in the past 16 years and to see how much the families are involved is important,” Neel said.

Neel said her favorite part of the job is interacting with family members and visitors.

“You see them look at the timelines. People that were alive have their immediate reaction to where they were on the day, but then you have the kids and it’s neat to see them understand the story and make a connection,” Neel said.

The organization’s volunteers also seem to be a large part of the moxie behind the mission to continue to share the story of what happened in Somerset County on Sept. 11, 2001.

Henry Scully, who is the executive director of the organization, said that they are appreciative of the volunteers and the local community.

“They all come from within an hour and a half and a lot of them have been here for 10 to 15 years,” Scully said.

Before he was a staff member of the organization, Scully was once a volunteer himself. He said the volunteer experience was rewarding in terms of the family members and visitors he has gotten to meet.

“It’s very difficult at times but also it’s very rewarding that these family members come back and see all that’s happened. They see all that the Friends have been doing and what the park service has been doing. So while it’s sad and emotional, we’re doing some things that they really appreciate,” Scully said.

Tom McMillan, vice president of communications for the Pittsburgh Penguins, serves on the board of directors for the Friends of Flight 93. He said that he first volunteered as a greeter at the site.

“It’s such a solemn, respectful site. In the early years, there was no way to get that information. The thing that strikes me about this is that it’s so much different because of the way people opened their hearts and homes in rural America. Pretty much everything that happens out there is volunteer,” McMillan said.

McMillan also noted that it is important to keep the story alive.

“We are who we are because of what happened. There aren’t many single days that changed the country like this. There’s a responsibility to collect the story because people are still around who were directly affected by that day. It’s not always going to be that way,” McMillan said.

For now, organization members are working on planning events for the upcoming 16th anniversary of Sept. 11.