

AU's 'Green Monster' serves as training ground for local firefighter's feat

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Alfred University's "Green Monster," a metal staircase that goes from Merrill Field to Pine Street, near the Miller Performing Arts Center and Ade Hall, is the training grounds for a local firefighter who will be participating in a 9-11 Memorial stair-climb event in Lancaster, PA, on Sept. 8.

Blake Mayo, a member of the Alfred Station Fire Department, has been climbing the "Green Monster," all 98 stairs, which is the equivalent of seven and a half stories. And he's been doing it in full turn-out gear that weighs 100 pounds, including an air pack, to prepare for the event. For the event itself Mayo will climb 110 stories the height of the World Trade Center twin towers that were destroyed on Sept. 11, 2001 when terrorists high-jacked planes and flew them into the towers to raise funds for the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF).

Of the 2,753 people who died that day, 343 were New York City firefighters or paramedics; Mayo, who has been a volunteer firefighter for 31 years in six different companies in three states, knew some of those who lost their lives.

Firefighters across the country will be participating in stair-climbing events on the same day. Participants will be given a photo and biographical information about a fallen firefighter to carry them as they make their climb. The event has been held annually since 2005.

Joining Mayo at the event will be another area firefighter, Brad Speta of Wellsville.

Mayo said the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation was created by the U.S. Congress after Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, initially to help the families of firefighters who died that day. Since then, the mission has been expanded to support the families of other firefighters, paid and volunteer, who have lost their lives in the line of duty. This year, Mayo notes, the list includes 10 firefighters from West Texas who were killed when a fertilizer plant exploded, and 19 in Arizona who died fighting wildfires.

Explaining his reason for undertaking the fund-raising effort, Mayo said the NFFF "has a tremendous task." Even though it was created by Congress, it receives no direct support. Any funds given to the families has to be raised by the Foundation through events such as the 9-11 Memorial stair-climb event.

“I’ve been training hard, and I am really excited about being a part of this cause,” said Mayo.

To support Mayo’s efforts, go to <http://9-11stairclimb.com/events.html> A map of the United States will appear. Click on Pennsylvania, then “support a climber.”

Mayo is married to Alexis Clare, professor of glass science at the Kazuo Inamori School of Engineering at Alfred University.