

Rose gardens may mark terror sites

BY MARY PICKELS
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The roots of inspiration can blossom from many sources. For a Portland, Ore., woman and a Ridgefield Park, N.J., man, it was the simple beauty of a rose.

On Sept. 26, 2001, Sue Casey attended a West Coast church service. As she opened her car door to drive home, she noticed a yellow rose flowering curbside.

At the time, she was trying to think of a way to comfort the family members of those who had died in the terrorist attacks 15 days earlier.

Living in Portland, known as the City of Roses, led her to an idea.

"I thought, 'I'll give them a rose garden,'" she said.

"I think I was like everyone else," Casey said recently. "I felt so helpless. ... I wanted to do something to make them feel better."

As she turned the key in the ignition, the phrase "Remember Me" popped into her head.

"It seemed appropriate," said Casey, a legal secretary. "And it's not just for the victims or the families, but for everyone who experienced Sept. 11."

Soon after, Casey launched "Remember Me Rose Gardens," and serves as president of the nonprofit. The goal is to eventually establish rose gardens on or near all three sites struck by terrorists — the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., and the field in Stonycreek Township, Somerset County. Each garden will include approximately 3,000 rose bushes, one for each of that day's victims.

Meanwhile, in New Jersey, Michael Mitchell nurtured a knack for making plants grow.

A few years ago, Casey and Mitchell were strangers. Mitchell operates Rose Gardens by Michael. Among his clients is Mary Kay Stratis, whose husband was killed in the 1988 crash of Pan Am Flight 103 in Lockerbie, Scotland. Her garden has more than 100 roses, a tribute



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Michael Mitchell, vice president of Remember Me Rose Gardens, stands in Shanksville with a bouquet she planned to her husband and a place of solace for her and her children.

Stratis also ran a support group, and a member showed her a newsletter about Remember Me Rose Gardens. At the time, she was working with a group of women who became widows after Sept. 11, 2001, and all of the families were given information about the gardens.

"She counseled them in her rose garden," Mitchell said.

The World Trade Center was six miles from Mitchell's home.

"I had friends in the center who had died," he said.

About 2 1/2 years ago, Stratis got in touch with him, and he contacted Casey.

"When I saw what she was doing," he said, "it occurred to me that that's what I could do to help. She didn't know a lot about roses, and I didn't know how to help."

From a great idea to fruition, though, will be a journey of patience and fund raising.

of roses like the ones he brings to every Flight 93 task force meeting to hand out to family members.



COURTESY OF MIKE KEMPLE

Sue Casey launched 'Remember Me Rose Gardens' and serves as president of the nonprofit organization.

"We have no money," he said. "We've spent thousands and thousands of our own money to get to this point."

Casey has cashed in retirement funds, refinanced her home

and used credit cards and overtime pay to finance the organization's creation.

"People are very receptive" to

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