

9 / 11 MEMORIAL GARDEN:

Seeds of Hope

By Michele Reed

Alice Massimi '02 sits on a bench near Glimmerglass Lagoon, a light breeze ruffling her hair as birds chirp in the spring sunshine. But her thoughts go back to a chilly autumn evening more than six years ago when the world seemed a dark and forbidding place.

It was the night of Sept. 11, 2001, and students, faculty and staff had gathered in the quad outside Hewitt Union and raised their candles high against the darkness of that hour.



On the evening of Sept. 11, 2001, thousands of students, faculty and staff gathered in a vigil for the victims.

"Light is a symbol of love, a symbol of knowledge, and also a symbol of truth," President Deborah F. Stanley reminded them. "At this vigil, in solidarity, we hold our candles to drive out the darkness of the night and in our world."

"I remember it like it was yesterday," says **Tim Barnhart '02**, then-Student Association president. "The memorial was one of my first acts as president."

Stanley's President's Council and the student leadership team worked together to organize one of the first memorials in New York state. "I've never seen a campus come together like this," Barnhart remembers. "Hundreds of students came out for it."

It had a huge impact on Massimi, who at the time was senior class coordinator in the alumni office.

"When all that happened, I personally felt helpless. Many of us had close family members working there. We all saw our nation under attack," says Massimi.

"It was a life-changing event. Something had to be done."

Massimi found something to do that gave meaning to the event for her and the other students who were at Oswego that day. "Once we knew we lost alumni, something had to be done to memorialize those who had walked the same path at Oswego, and perished in such a horrific event."

She and her classmates decided to raise money to establish a memorial garden for the 12 alumni lost when the Twin Towers collapsed.

"We put buckets [for donations] out at all the senior class events and in the Hewitt Union," she recalls.

The memorial garden became the class gift of the Classes of 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 — all the classes who were on campus when the World Trade Center collapsed.

Their work came to fruition Sept. 11, 2005, when the garden was dedicated.

COMMITMENT TO HOPE

"It was very emotional," Massimi said. "You see the families, see the hurt. But you also saw they were grateful that the campus remembered. That was the rewarding aspect of it."

Several family members of victims came, including 19 members of the Hannan family and 12 members of the Brattons.

"It's a wonderful tribute to all those lost," said Andrea Hannan, widow of **Michael Hannan '89**, at the 2005 dedication.

Mary Bratton, mother of **Michelle Bratton '00**, said she knew her daughter was there by the purple flowers, Michelle's favorite color. "This is like her second home," she said at the time.

Barnhart returned to campus and Massimi flew up from Savannah, Ga., where she is an anchor on a TV news show. "It felt good to know that we had done something to maybe help with the healing," she says.

That sunny afternoon in the autumn

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of 2005, Barnhart echoed the words he spoke four years before, calling for hope amid terror. “This memorial . . . represents the same hopes that our fallen family members had when they first came to Oswego. Hope for learning, hope for friendship, and hope for growth,” Barnhart said. “We pledge to honor those alumni we’ve lost with a commitment to hope, and a commitment to always remember them through this beautiful memorial. Let hope be SUNY Oswego’s true legacy of September 11th.”

COMMUNAL GIFT

The garden was the brainchild of the senior classes, but community members and campus staff contributed generously as well, bringing the total to more than \$8,000 to construct the garden.

Their contributions were not limited to funds alone.

Mary DePentu, director of facilities, maintenance and operation, designed the garden and campus grounds crews worked over the summer of 2005 to prepare the site and plant the perennials which make up the botanical sanctuary.

“I really wanted to pay respect to those who lost their lives and for their families,” DePentu remembers of her creative process in designing the garden. “But I also wanted to give a signal of hope.”

The garden overlooks Glimmerglass Lagoon, and gives visitors a quiet place to reflect.

“This beautiful, tranquil setting offers the opportunity for Oswego students, faculty, and staff not only to respect and remember those who lost their lives on

that tragic day, but also to contemplate what’s going in their own lives,” says DePentu.

DESIGNED WITH LOVE

DePentu put much thought into the plantings for the garden. An English style bench is surrounded by deciduous and conifer trees, ground cover, perennials and bulbs. The plants are placed to surround visitors in a blanket of green until the fall season when the site springs into color, in remembrance of the 12 alumni victims. Fall blooming crocus, witch hazel, red berries of winterberry holly, and perennial plants of autumn joy sedum and blue aster brighten the autumn landscape. **Shawn Boshart ’89**, owner of Oswego County Monuments, created a memorial plaque with the names of the

Alice Massimi ’02 spearheaded the drive to revive the senior gift program and plant a memorial garden to remember those lost on Sept. 11, 2001.



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Relatives of **Michelle Bratton '00**, aunt Regina Trainor and cousin Nicole Trainor, embrace as cousin Jaclyn Ulmer looks on, at the Dedication of the 9/11 Memorial Garden at Glimmerglass Lagoon, Sept. 11, 2005.

12 alumni, affixed to a large boulder in the front of the garden.

Campus grounds staff worked hard to make the garden beautiful, but the reaction of the victims' families was worth it.

"While the staff was working on it, you could see their pride," says DePentu. "They picked up materials, delivered the mulch."

"I was there when the families came and saw what we had done and they were inspired," says grounds crew member Kevin Dice. "It gives you that warm feeling

that you did something meaningful and it will last a long time."

DePentu was touched by the families' reactions as well. Her voice breaking with emotion, she recalls that she drove one victim's mother around campus, taking the same route her daughter would have taken on her way to class each day. "I stopped on the Seneca Bridge and we looked to the south and we could see the September 11 memorial," DePentu recounts. "It really meant a lot to her. She said, 'My daughter would have loved this.'"



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The garden is a magnet for students, faculty and staff, many of whom walk around Glimmerglass for exercise. DePentu relates that community members make a special trip to see the memorial, and a group of senior citizens even came to visit and reflect.

The garden had one other lasting effect. It spurred the revival of the senior class gift, which raised nearly \$21,000 during the *Inspiring Horizons* campaign and inspired a culture of philanthropy among Oswego's young alumni.

"There are more and more of these recent graduates giving back than in previous years," says Massimi. "And I think a lot of that is due to the senior gift. You learn to give back before you even leave here, so continue that once you've left Oswego."

A New Tradition

When the classes of 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 pooled their donations to create the 9/11 Memorial Garden, they renewed a forgotten tradition at Oswego: the senior class gift.

Since those students successfully completed their drive, subsequent classes have shown their own generosity to Oswego. T-shirt sales, gifts in honor of a parent or professor, and donations in amounts like \$20.05 and \$20.06 filled the coffers.

Each year surpassed the last, according to **Michelle Tackett-Spinner '98**, associate alumni director. The Class of 2008 raised about \$7,500.

"The students work hard each year, with great enthusiasm, to raise the senior class gift," said Tackett-Spinner. "They are excited about leaving a legacy on the campus for future classes."

Recent class gifts have included:

- 2006** Row of seats in Campus Center ice arena/convocation center
- 2007** Garden in front of Campus Center
- 2008** Refurbishing the clock in the quad in front of Penfield Library, complete with garden
- 2009** To be determined by class members



JENNIFER BRODRICK

Two classes enhanced the Campus Center. The Class of 2006 donated a row of seats in the ice arena (left). Students who graduated in 2007 made a garden in front of the building a reality (below).

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