

The Privilege of a Lifetime

An Interview with Joseph C. Daniels,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
National September 11 Memorial & Museum



EDITORS' NOTE Joe Daniels successfully opened the 9/11 Memorial, first to the families of the victims on the 10th anniversary of the September 11th attacks, and then to the public on the following day. He is now focused on operating the Memorial, which welcomed its millionth visitor in December 2011, and on opening the 9/11 Memorial Museum. Daniels directs planning, design, programming, development, and operations for the project. He has led the organization to many accomplishments, including a fundraising campaign in excess of \$400 million. Prior to his work with the 9/11 Memorial, he was Chief of External Initiatives at the Robin Hood Foundation. Before that, he was a consultant at McKinsey & Co. and an attorney at Cravath, Swaine & Moore. He holds a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a B.A. in History from Washington University.



Joseph C. Daniels

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The National September 11 Memorial & Museum (911memorial.org) is the not-for-profit corporation created to oversee the design, fundraising, programming, and operations of the Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center. The Memorial and Museum are located on 8 of the 16 acres of the World Trade Center site. The Memorial was dedicated on the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and is now open to the public. The Memorial remembers and honors the 2,983 people who were killed in the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993.

How did the design for the Memorial come about?

The Memorial design was selected through an open competition that became the largest international design competition ever held. There were more than 5,200 entries from 63 countries that spanned an enormous range of ideas, from the most literal to the most abstract. The design that was ultimately chosen is somewhere in between: a symbolic marking of the sacred footprints where the two towers stood.

The memorial jury that selected the design included a 9/11 family member, representatives for the New York Governor and New York City Mayor, Maya Lin – who designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – and other members of the arts and cultural communities. The winning design

came from Michael Arad, a young, then-unknown architect who was working for the New York City Housing Authority at the time. The design sets two memorial pools in the footprints of the twin towers with the names of the victims inscribed in bronze around the perimeters of the pools. The pools are surrounded by hundreds of trees. While there is sadness, there is also a sense of inspiration and hope that the best of humanity can overcome horrific tragedy, that these people did not die in vain, and that we have all been brought closer together because of what happened.

Did the opening on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and the reception the memorial received exceed your expectations?

The 10th anniversary is a day that I will never forget. That morning, I was reminded of a statistic that still shocks me: 40 percent of all the 9/11 victims' families never received any remains of their loved ones, never got to go through the basic ritual of burial that is important to so many. To be on the Memorial with the families on 9/11 this year – to see a child, a parent, a widow, a brother or a sister touch the name of their loved one and realize that name, inscribed in bronze, will be here until the end of time – was something that could not have been more meaningful. In a moment, it truly made this challenging project worth it.

We opened to the public the following day, September 12, 2011. We've received so many moving responses from across the country and around the globe, and we welcomed our millionth visitor in just three and a half months, a true indication that the public's will to commemorate is as strong as ever.

While this is a New York-based memorial, what happened on 9/11 was an international event. How critical was it to build a memorial that could capture that global focus?

The global nature of the Memorial and Museum, and of 9/11 itself, is absolutely essential. More than 90 nations lost citizens on 9/11. The World Trade Center was filled with people who came from around the world to work in New York and who represented the incredible diversity of our global community.

We have had reservations made to visit the memorial from over 115 different countries, which shows that people who come to New York today still recognize the importance of the World Trade Center and its history.

Where does the museum stand today and what will the end product look like?

Our mission is twofold: to commemorate those who were lost and to educate for a better future. The Memorial represents the commemoration side, but the Museum is just as important, as it will be the global focal point for preserving the history of 9/11.

At the heart of the Museum is a memorial exhibition that will honor the lives of each of the 2,983 victims through individual biographies, photographs, and personal remembrances. It will be a special place for families of victims, but will also underscore the message that those who were killed were everyday mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters – no different than you and I.

The Museum will also include a historical exhibition that will have three parts. The first will preserve the history of what happened that day and the second will examine what led up to it. The story of 9/11 is part of a much larger narrative, one that began long before that day and continues to shape our world far beyond it. The third part of the historical exhibition will address what it means to live in a post-9/11 world. It will cover the nine-month rescue and recovery effort at the World Trade Center and bring visitors all the way up to present day and the broad questions that still resonate: how to balance civil liberties with national security, how to fight global terrorism, and many others.

We have received thousands of contributions to the Museum's collection. The Museum will include monumental artifacts, including pieces of recovered steel and emergency response vehicles that were damaged, as well as personal artifacts, oral histories, and digital documentation.

When the opportunity presented itself to be engaged in this effort, did you know right away it was the right fit for you?

Working on this project has been the privilege of a lifetime. I'll never forget stepping out of the World Trade Center subway station on September 11, 2001 into chaos. Those images are seared in my memory forever, but so – thank God – are images from after that, when we all came together to heal. The notion that I could come back and channel the emotions from 9/11 into rebuilding the city and country I love has been amazing. ●

The 9/11 Memorial and the Memorial Museum pavilion at dusk