

Remembering 9/11 victims by climbing

Written by Chris Lee

Two flights of eight steps made up one floor. Multiply that by 110 floors and you have roughly 1,760 steps. That's how many steps Lance Murray climbed while wearing his bunker gear and wearing his SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) pack last Friday, Sept. 11 in Denver.

Murray, a member of Holyoke Volunteer Fire Dept. since 2004, had seen the Denver Stair Climb on the news for the past few years and decided he wanted to take part this year. Not knowing how to get involved, he contacted a friend who told him to sign up online in July.

On July 1, Murray got online and signed up. He said it only took seven days to fill the 343 spots. The 5th Annual Denver Stair Climb took part on Friday, Sept. 11.

Why would someone want to climb 110 stories wearing firefighters gear? The answer—to honor the 343 firefighters who lost their lives in the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001 after the only mass terrorist attack on American soil.

Firefighters from Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas and Wyoming traveled to the 55-story Quest Tower in Denver to commemorate the victims of the attacks. The goal—to climb the staircase of the building twice. The twin towers had 110 stories before they collapsed.

Before each of the 343 firefighters began, a firefighter from New York stood at the bottom of the stairs and shook the hand of each participant. Murray said the firefighter had been in New York on 9/11 and lost a lot of friends and firefighters.

A moment of silence was held before heading up and some bagpipes were played, Murray said.

Dressed in full bunker gear and his SCBA, Murray along with firefighters Travis Guthrie and Carlos Meza from Evans began the grueling march up the stairs. Murray said by the 25th floor he thought of giving up. Roughly 45 minutes later, they had reached the top of the building.

“You could see for miles up there,” Murray said.

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On different floors throughout the trip, employees in the building kept doors open to provide some air conditioning. Some even handed out water and paper towels to dry off, Murray said.

After a quick elevator ride down and a short break, they were ready to do it again. Fifty-five more stories. Murray said the second trip felt quicker.

Some of the groups carried up 50 feet of 2.5 inch hose. Murray said by the time he got back to Holyoke his shirt was still drenched with sweat.

The Boulder Daily News was on scene to take video and Murray said he can be seen in the back-ground roughly 30 seconds into the video.

So why did he do it? "Giving something back to the 9/11 firefighter victims," Murray said. "It wasn't about me, I don't want to be selfish. I just did it for 9/11. Out here there's nothing to do to remember it so this was a good thing."

Each of the 343 people making the climb in Denver received a picture of one of the firefighter victims. Murray carried Lt. Harvey L. Harrell's photo with him on his climb. Harrell was with the R-5 or Rescue 5 group in New York.

After the event, the firefighters were asked to contact the family of the person they carried with them. Murray said the web site where he signed up provided information to contact the families. He sent a letter to the family telling them he appreciated what Harrell did. Murray mentioned he feels he knows Harrell after reading over his information.

He would like to participate in the event again. He said he may want to hit the gym. He prepared by riding his bike this year.

Murray has been a member of Holyoke Volunteer Fire Dept. for just over five years. He runs his own construction business providing small jobs for people.

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