

Memorial soothes Sept. 11 grief

Crews at Pentagon site race to meet anniversary deadline

BY STEVE VOGEL
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WASHINGTON — Jonathan Fisher walked slowly, searching for a name Friday morning among the stainless steel benches laid out in perfect rows along the Pentagon's west wall.

His feet crunched on the gravel as he stepped around concrete basins and the pipes that will create pools of flowing water under each bench at the Pentagon Memorial. He bent to peer at the names etched on the benches. Then he spotted Gerald P. Fisher.

"I finally found it," he told his wife.

His father, known to friends and family as Geep, was a defense contractor for Booz Allen and Hamilton working at the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. The Potomac, Md., man was among the 184 killed when terrorists flew a hijacked American Airlines jet into the building, passing directly over the spot where Jonathan Fisher now stood.

Fisher rubbed his hands slowly on the granite slab laid atop the steel bench. He sat on the bench, gingerly at first.

"This is the place where my father died," said Fisher, 36, of McLean, Va. "Seeing there is some place we can go to, a place to draw strength from, even though it's very upsetting to come to this place, it's very comforting."

The Pentagon Memorial is to be dedicated Sept. 11, the seventh anniversary of the terrorist attacks. Friday, at the start of the Memorial Day weekend, Fisher was among more than a dozen family members of victims gathered at the site, dabbing tears and snapping pictures as they toured the memorial park.

Construction crews are rushing to complete the work, working seven-day weeks now to make up for time lost to recent rains.

"We're going to make sure it's done and done right and done on time," said Chris Hartzler, senior project manager for Balfour Beatty, the contractor. "This project has a lot of meaning for everyone on the job."

The 184 benches, each honoring a victim, are in varying states of completion. On the southern side of the two-acre park, where the benches for the youngest victims will be, concrete basins sit atop footings. In the memorial's midsection, stainless steel

benches have been installed atop the basins. The benches on the northern side, where Fisher's father is honored, have already been fitted with granite tops.

Workers are connecting pipes and jets that will stream water through each basin, keeping the pool of water underneath each bench perpetually moving. Lights are being installed to shine through the pools, illuminating the base of each bench. Workers will be testing the elaborate waterworks in coming weeks.

Reflecting the urgency of the schedule, workers continued preparing the site even as family members wandered through. A crew with a forklift lowered a 1,200-pound stainless steel bench onto a cart used to deliver the load to its spot. Another team drilled 10-inch deep holes into a concrete basin to anchor a bench in place.

At the south end of the site, an excavator scooped up dirt, grading the ground for an entrance to the memorial. Family members expressed delight at the work continuing around them.

"I love it that they're still working while we're here," said Wendy Ploger, whose father, Robert P. Ploger, died in the attack.

Family members chatted with construction workers, who proudly showed off their work.

"When they take the time to thank everyone who's working at the site, it goes a long way with the guys," said Hartzler, the project manager.

About half of the 90 paper-bark maples planned for the memorial have been planted, scattered among the benches.

The trees, now eight to 12 feet tall, will grow to 30 feet with large canopies of red foliage in the fall.

The Pentagon Memorial Fund has raised \$19 million of the \$22 million needed for construction, including \$3 million collected in the past three months, fund president James Laychak said Friday. An additional \$10 million is needed for an endowment that would maintain the site.

"We still have a ways to go, but I'm confident we'll get there," said Laychak, whose brother David Laychak was killed in the attack. "When we dedicate the memorial, it will be an historic day," he added, noting that this will be the first national Sept. 11 memorial to open.

Fisher, sitting on his father's bench, recalled seeing the architect's rendering for the memorial and marveled at its transformation into steel, concrete and granite.

"It's something I can touch and feel rather than see in pictures," he said, rubbing his fingers across the smooth granite. "It's gone from nothing to this."

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I edited this story on the rim and wrote the headline and deck, changing Washington Post style into AP style where applicable. One such instance came in the lead, where the article originally used "yesterday morning" instead of "Friday morning."