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Opinion

Editorial: Steel 'trees' symbol of hope

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On September 11, 2001, our nation – the world, actually – became a completely different place.

The events that took place on that date shook every notion we had that we are safe and secure where we live, work and play. We are not.

But we as Americans always look for solace in tragedy, comfort in numbers and safety standing as citizens among citizens.

And the City of Coatesville, a place that has seen its own comfort level reduced over the years, on Wednesday was the recipient of a symbol of triumph over tragedy, of the spirit that overcomes any obstacle or adversity or enemy.

Five hundred tons of Lukens steel on Wednesday made its way to Coatesville after more than three decades used to support the World Trade Center.

In 1969, the last trainload carrying the structural shapes, known as "trees," pulled out of Lukens Steel headquarters in Coatesville destined for New York City to become part of the two tallest buildings in the world.

Until the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, the steel framed the first nine floors of the North and South Towers. So it seemed fitting on Wednesday that two of the trucks transporting the steel were involved in a minor crash. Nothing like a last-minute bit of adversity to once again prove that Americans can overcome just about anything.

The steel, which now represents relics of a terrorist attack that resulted in the deaths of 3,000 people, will become the centerpiece of the proposed The National Iron & Steel Heritage Museum to be built in the Lukens Historic District on South First Avenue in Coatesville.

"It's our goal to honor those who lost their lives on 9/11, as well as the steelworkers who created the steel for these monumental buildings during the 1960s," said Scott Huston, a descendent of the Lukens family and president of the Graystone Society, a local historic preservation group.

The World Trade Center's twisted steel supports, among the few remaining pieces of the 110-story skyscrapers still standing in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, became an iconic image of defiance and strength for a mourning nation.

"We feel that it is only fitting that these trees become the keystone of The National Iron and Steel Heritage Museum, especially as the 10th anniversary of 9/11 draws near," Huston said.

Though the event will be somber in tone, the arrival of the World Trade Center artifacts is also seen as an element of the rebirth of the city of 11,000.

The Graystone Society is forming a committee to oversee the design for a memorial that will incorporate the structures. The group is named for the Graystone Mansion, part of The Lukens National Historic District that also includes the 35,000-square foot former industrial building that will be museum's home.

So out of the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, where thousands lost their lives, comes the triumph of forever honoring their ultimate sacrifice. We are proud to have the steel “trees” return to the place where they began their journey.

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