



Monumental project

Greenwich architect talks about 9/11 memorial for Cos Cob Park

By Anne W. Semmes

Greenwich architect Charles "Chuck" Hilton has handled his share of big projects in his 20-plus years in the design business. None of them, however, are quite as special as one project he has been working on since 2011. Back then, Hilton was chosen by the nonprofit Greenwich Community Project Fund to create a monument commemorating the 32 people with Greenwich ties who perished in the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Community Project's vision, and Hilton's goal, is to create a memorial that is accessible year-round and that will provide "valuable educational resources to the community's youth about the meaning and impact of a moment in our history that should always be remembered."

Now, the project is coming closer to being a reality and the hope is that it will be completed in the new park on the site of the former Cos Cob power plant sometime in the spring of 2015. We spoke to Hilton to learn more about the monument's design, what in-



Charles Hilton in his Greenwich office with a sample of the glass to be used in his design for the Cos Cob Park Sept. 11 memorial.

spired him and the emotions and responsibilities involved in working on the 9/11 project.

Q: Where were you when you heard about 9/11?

A: I was in my office. It was one of those beautiful

clear, crisp fall days. One of my staff came in and told me that a plane had hit one of the towers. I imagined, like many people, that it was some sort of small private plane. We flipped on the radio and were surprised to learn that it was a commercial airliner

that had hit one of the towers. We listened intently as the news reports rolled in. Then the second tower was hit. Clearly, this was not an accident. Then the Pentagon. We were all glued to the radio as one unbelievable

See Architect on A4

Architect designing Cos Cob Park memorial

Continued from A1
event after another unfolded. Finally, I heard that the south tower had collapsed. I couldn't imagine it. For years I had heard and studied the structures of these buildings and how the steel structure was designed to withstand hurricanes and earthquakes. I imagined a piece of the façade had fallen off, but reports reiterated a collapse. I ran out of the office to go home to Darien to grab a small TV. I couldn't believe my eyes, seeing only one tower standing. Then, within seconds the second tower collapsed. By then the Pentagon and Flight 93 reports had happened. The world had no idea when or how this was all going to end. I picked up the phone to call the office and send everyone home, but could not get through. After

several attempts, I jumped back in my car to return to Greenwich. I remember driving past the train station in Darien and waiting for dazed businessmen to shuffle across the road as they returned home from a day that had hardly begun. I returned to the office, sent everyone home and returned to Darien to watch the unfolding of events from the security of home the remainder of the day. It was a day I knew none of us would ever forget.

Q: Did you know anyone who died?

A: Fortunately, no one I was very close with. One of our former clients died in the towers and my family learned of a number of friends, schoolmates and clients that lost someone close to them.

Q: Why were you chosen to do the design?

A: I was in Greenwich Rotary with Mary Ann Morrison, who at the time was head of the Greenwich Chamber of Commerce and also the Greenwich Community Projects Fund. She was familiar with my work and asked me if I would help them with this project.

Q: How did you feel when you were chosen?

A: I was honored.

Q: Is there added pressure because of the subject/project?

A: Yes. There is so much emotion around this subject. I felt a tremendous responsibility to capture the significance of the event and the emotion of the country at that time, while being respectful of the tremendous loss to the families and the country during that day and the weeks and months that followed.

Q: Do you have a design in mind?

A: Yes, we have designed a memorial for a site in the



Lindsay Perry/Staff photographer
Charles Hilton with a rendering of his design for the Cos Cob Park Sept. 11 memorial.

new Cos Cob park together with Doyle Herman who developed the landscape portion of the memorial.

Q: What did you turn to as inspiration?

A: There were several inspirations for our design. First, was the "Tribute in Light" Memorial that was installed on the former Trade Center site in 2002. They installed powerful spot lights on the ground shining up into the New York skyline marking the spot where the towers formerly stood. It was so ethereal, there and not there at the same time. I found it

very powerful and wanted to try to capture this in a material form. The other significant inspiration was the makeshift memorials that cropped up around New York and the country as families and friends searched desperately for their loved ones. There were pictures and names, cards and letters surrounded by American flags. Flags were flying everywhere, at people's homes, around our streets, on our lapels and on our cars. The flags were a symbol of our unity as a country in a way that we might not have been united since World War II, and in my opinion people were kinder, gentler and more focused on each other as we came to grips with our losses and mobilized to defend our country. The American flag became a symbol of all of this.

Q: Can you describe it? What materials?

A: A person approaches the memorial from one of two spiraling paths in the new park, one from the parking area and the other from the waterfront walkway. The paths lead through

a wildflower meadow gently up hill to a protected bluff overlooking Cos Cob Harbor. The memorial design consists of two 12-foot-high by 20-inch-square glass towers, in scale and proportion with the former Trade Center towers. They are made from super clear low iron glass clad with the stars and stripes of the American flag. The names of the Greenwich victims are etched into the stripes of each of their respective towers. The towers sit on a stone terrace which is an abstraction of the Trade Center Plaza. In the pavement near the towers is a plaque containing the name of one of the victims who died on Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pa., and radiating from the center of the plaza are three markers pointing to New York, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville. It is my hope that the collection of these elements, the glass towers that are there and not there all at the same time, the wall of names surrounded by the flag, a symbol our national unity and strength, the bareness of the terrace, the magnificence of the scenic Greenwich site, and the diversity and harmony of the wildflower meadow that surround it speak to future generations about this event of our lifetimes.

For those interested in contributing to the privately funded Sept. 11 memorial, donations can be made on the Greenwich Community Project Fund's website at www.Sept11memorialgreenwich.org, or sent to Greenwich Community Projects Fund, 44 Amogerone Crossway, No. 8005, Greenwich, Conn. 06836.

REMEMBERING TERROR ATTACK VICTIMS



Lindsay Perry/Staff photographer
Charles Hilton, left, reviews construction drawings with Project Managers Andrew Allison, center, and Jason Wyman in their Greenwich office. Hilton is the architect chosen for the Cos Cob Park Sept. 11 memorial.