

Tahoe firefighters make 9/11 memorial climb



Those who made the climb on Sept. 11, 2014, top row from left, Michael Taormina (firefighter SLTFD), Daniel Vallejo, (firefighter SLTFD), Chuck Malone (captain LVFPD), Michael Anderson (firefighter LVFPD); bottom row from left, Michael Mileski (firefighter SLTFD), Brennen Davis (firefighter SLTFD) and Scott Blasser (firefighter SLTFD). Photo/Provided

By Scott Blasser

On Sept. 11, 2001, our country was attacked. It forever changed our nation in countless ways. In 2009, four firefighters from the Sac Metro Fire Department established a 9/11 Memorial Climb to honor the 343 firefighters that gave their lives on 9/11. The climb is symbolic in nature: 343 died that day, 343 climb to remember.

I am a firefighter for the city of South Lake Tahoe. This year six of my fellow basin firefighters and myself had the honor

to make this climb. We donned our turnouts and ascended the staircases of the Renaissance Tower in Sacramento four times to equal 110 floors (the journey to the top of the once standing Twin Towers). The climb was hot and stifling. Some stopped for breaks to avoid passing out. Some of us poured water on our heads to avoid heat exhaustion.

Our final ascent placed us at the top of the building where we placed the name of the firefighter we carried in a memorial sculpture. We hung their names and stood for a moment contemplating the sacrifice given. The memorial said simply: *Never Forget.*

On 9/11, 343 firefighters climbed toward one common goal of putting the fire out. The country watched in horror at the events. What I hope the country learned that day is there is no emergency the fire service will yield to.

I have the honor of working with some of the most generous, loyal and funny individuals I know. We love to serve the public. The best part of any shift has and always will be a community member approaching us and striking up conversation. We take complaints and praises alike.

More than anything, we want the public to know we are here for any reason to help. If we don't have the answer, we will find it.

I believe the public appreciates what we do. We report to duty, train, maintain equipment, run calls and into the evening we wait. It appears simple. In many ways it is. In so many more ways it is not.

We see life and death up close. We see people lose all their possessions. Even worse we see them lose their loved ones. I believe this experience makes us unique. We see a side to life most are unfamiliar with. You might think this makes us callus, but it is very much an opposite effect. A shift that

is physically and emotionally challenging sends us home thankful. Thankful we have the privilege to serve. Thankful we are alive. Thankful we could help.

Thirteen years ago tones went off in every fire station throughout New York – 343 firefighters answered that call. They gave their lives going into those towers. They went in with a simple goal: put the fire out.

The city of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department as well as Lake Valley Fire Protection District answers those same tones daily along with every other fire department across our nation. No matter the need we will be there. Further our brothers and sisters in law enforcement give just as much. We thank the public for their trust.

To close, I would ask the following:

- Never forget the sacrifice given that day.
- Never forget we are here to serve this community 24-7-365.

It is our honor to serve the city of South Lake Tahoe. Know that when the tones go off we will be there to put the fire out.

Scott Blasser is a South Lake Tahoe firefighter.