**[The Daily Nebraskan]**

HEADLINE: Coalition of UNL organizations gather outside Union to honor 9/11 victims

Sawyer Belair Sept. 13, 2022

Twenty-one years and a day from the onset of the generation-defining Sep. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, 17 volunteers gathered on the front lawn of the Nebraska Union just before 8 a.m. Monday to pay their respects.

The golden curtain of dawn had just begun to roll over the Meier Commons when the group, composed of members from various university organizations including the governing Association of Students of the University of Nebraska (ASUN), Student Veterans of America (SVA) and the Military and Veterans Success Center (MVSC), went to work planting a hundred-odd American flags and signposts detailing the 9/11 attacks across the freshly-trimmed green space, to remain in place until 3 p.m. when the volunteers came back to remove them.

The volunteers were led by MVSC director Joe Brownell, who distributed the fixtures, giving out large handfuls at a time after chiding the eager participants that it “wasn’t a race.” Nonetheless, they made short work of the task at hand, with the grassy field across from the Union awash with reminders of the fateful day – and the national solidarity it invoked – in a matter of minutes.

One of the volunteers present Monday morning was Everett Bloom, a junior history and political science major and four-year veteran of the Navy. Additionally, he serves as president of the SVA, which works alongside the MSVC to help veterans and active-duty military personnel to achieve a well-rounded education at UNL.

Though he has no direct association to the deadly attacks that killed just under 3,000 and injured 6,000 more, Bloom said he believes all Americans can feel a personal connection to the event, as well as the bloody conflicts that followed in the Middle East.

“It fills me with gratitude and respect for the people that lost their lives, the victims [and] their families,” Bloom said. “It’s a solemn day (of remembrance), but also it’s a day that really makes you think about our freedoms and the things we hold dear in this country.”

Brownell also placed an emphasis on the 60 other countries who lost citizens during the attacks on the internationally-frequented World Trade Center, as well as the first responders who renounced their own personal safety to rescue victims from the attacks.

“(The first responders) knew that some of them probably weren’t going to come back that day, but they still gave the ultimate sacrifice to try to save others,” Brownell said. “We sometimes forget the great people that we have in our country that would do that on any given day.”

Although Brownell, a veteran of the Air Force who deployed after the 2001 attacks, said that the memorial is personal for him, he also sees it as a chance for Americans to turn their attention away from negativity in the modern press and public discourse and towards the military and, more locally, the campus itself.

“We’re very fortunate in this country, (yet) there’s a lot of negativity out there, whichever side you’re on, but there’s a heck of a lot more positive stuff going on,” he said. “What we represent here (in aiding veterans and those still serving), is the importance of freedom (and) being able to work and study and be a part of this campus.”

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