



## Schools teach importance of Sept. 11 attacks

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Friday, September 11, 2009

Emily Ontiveros was a confused 5-year-old on Sept. 11, 2001. Eight years later, she said she's finally starting to grasp the magnitude of the day when nearly 3,000 people were killed aboard four jetliners and at the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon and a field in western Pennsylvania.

"I don't really remember Sept. 11, but I've learned a lot from it since then," Ontiveros said. "I know that was when the Twin Towers were attacked by terrorists, but it's become more of a celebration and remembrance of all the veterans and of everything they're fighting for. I really am more grateful for everything, like all the freedom and equalities, and I think it's good for a lot of kids because they don't really think twice about it."

On Thursday, Ontiveros joined her peers at Pinon Mesa Middle School in Phelan for an early Patriot Day celebration, including a parade of the 50 state flags, patriotic music and words of wisdom from veterans and current military members. It was the largest Sept. 11 remembrance ceremony at the school, which has been holding similar events since Sept. 13, 2001.

Schools across the Victor Valley continue to commemorate the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks with ceremonies of remembrance for those killed and celebrations of patriotism. Some schools reserve a simple moment of silence, while others use the day as an opportunity to teach student responsibility and citizenship.

Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps cadet Briana Buchanan, 16, planned to get to the **Academy of Academic Excellence** in Apple Valley by 6 a.m. today to begin staking nearly 3,000 miniflags — one for every victim killed in the Sept. 11 attacks — into the grassy area outside the school's main building.

"I think it will give the day a significance because we don't really think about 9/11 anymore," Buchanan said. "I mean we do, but ... we've become sort of complacent."

AAE's associated student body has pasted every victim's name on a large red poster for the ceremony, said ASB President Kaitlin Unferdorfer. She said the day's especially significant for her family because of her father's job as captain for the Apple Valley Fire Protection District.

"It's just really important to me how many firemen and police officers lost their lives and actually perished in trying to save others," she said. "It just reminds me to be grateful for everything I do have because in a second it can all change."

At 6:45 a.m. today Sultana High School is hosting a 15-minute public ceremony including patriotic choir music, the pledge of allegiance and posting the colors with the Air Force Junior ROTC.

Hesperia students school-wide will gather in the Lime Street Elementary quad for a

Patriot Day observance this morning, according to Principal Carol Whitton. A similar ceremony is planned at Park View Elementary in Victorville.

“It’s all about the people that died and who lost their lives for us ...,” said Pinon Mesa Middle School student Brian Reed, 14. “And how they make us so we’re free and that we’re allowed to be in a country where we don’t have to fear.”

Melissa Vacio, 13, proudly carried the U.S. Air Force flag at Pinon Mesa Middle School’s Thursday ceremony. It was especially meaningful for Vacio, who on Wednesday said goodbye to her aunt, a U.S. Marine heading for Afghanistan.

Though Sept. 11 marks a tragic event, Vacio said, “our country actually united because of the Twin Towers falling. Because many people died and many were heroes, they reunite when it comes to that day.”

Pinon Mesa leadership teacher and Activities Director Curt Chase said 90 percent of students dressed in red, white and blue on Thursday in honor of the ceremony, which concluded with the release of dozens of balloons and colorful confetti.

“We hear from them that this is one of their favorite assemblies, even though it’s pretty serious,” Chase said. “The majority of kids really want to understand it, really want to grasp what happened that day and they’re very touched by it. They seemed to really want to learn from that day.”



DAVID PARD, DAILY PRESS

IN MEMORY OF EACH VICTIM: Reserve Officers’ Training Corps logistics officer **Erin McFadden, 16, a junior at the Academy of Academic Excellence in Apple Valley**, prepares a 15-foot banner with nearly 3,000 names printed of those killed in the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001. A brief ceremony will be held at 8 a.m. today at the school with thousands of small American flags in memory of each victim.

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