THE PRIVILEGE OF A LIFETIME

BY KATHRYN LEVY FELDMAN

As president and CEO of the private foundation that owns, operates, and finances the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, alumnus Joe Daniels has weathered political battles, emotional conflicts, economic challenges, construction headaches, and more to honor those who died that day and document the process of rebuilding and recovery at Ground Zero.

Like a lot of New Yorkers, Joe Daniels L'98 has a 9/11 story: That morning, on his way to a nine o'clock meeting across the street from the World Trade Center, he got off the E train and emerged from the subway at 8:50—four minutes after the first plane hit. He saw "a fireball in the sky and a plume of smoke," and started running. At 9:03 he saw the second plane strike and watched as people jumped from the burning buildings.

He had made it as far as Washington Square Park when the South Tower collapsed at 9:59 and had reached his home in the West Village by the time the North Tower came down at 10:28, watching it from the roof of his building. It felt "like a general attack on the United States," he recalls. "I knew I was witnessing the entire order of the world shifting."

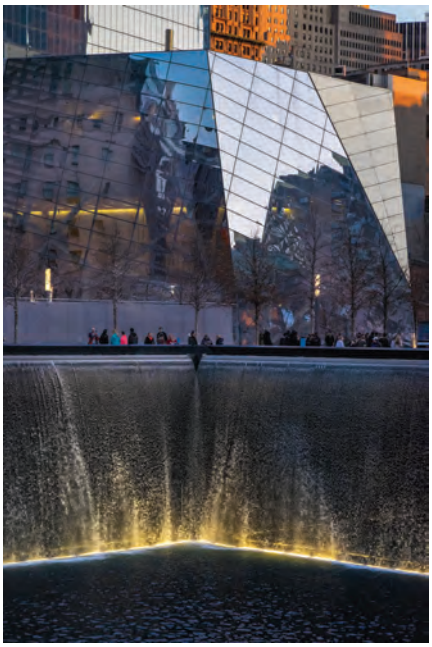
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DON HAMERMAN


9/11
MEMORIAL

Along with the day's indelible images of death and devastation, Daniels says he was equally struck by the sight of first responders and rescuers running along the West Side Highway toward Ground Zero. Cheering their efforts, along with his wife, neighbors, and total strangers, he felt an "almost spiritual connection" to them, to his city, and to "those around the world who poured their hearts out in grief and compassion." He knew he would always remember the coming together as much as the falling apart.

He also knew his own life had to change.

Within months, Daniels had left his corporate job for work in the non-profit sector. In May 2005, seizing the "chance to be directly involved in something" that had had such an outsized impact on his own life, he became one of the first employees at what is now The National September 11 Memorial & Museum at the World Trade Center Foundation, Inc. Initially hired as counsel for the foundation—which owns, operates, and finances the 9/11 Memorial and Museum—he was named president and CEO in 2006.



Daniels admits he had his eye on the top job from the beginning—enough so that he saved the newspaper ad that ran in *Crain's New York Business*. Enlarged and framed, it now hangs on the wall above his desk. *"Raise money, build and oversee operations for memorial and cultural centers at Ground Zero,"* the job description reads. *"Downside: Taking on an enormous highly politicized and scrutinized task."* The upside? *"Being in charge of what will likely be the most visited, highest-profile place in New York."*

Check and check.

During his tenure, Daniels has helped resolve conflicts among stakeholders so that construction on the 9/11 Memorial could finally start in 2006, oversaw its completion in time for the 10th anniversary of the attacks, and is now presiding over the May 21 opening of The National September 11 Memorial Museum. Built on the literal bedrock of Ground Zero, the museum houses more than 10,000 artifacts, from archival documents to first-responder vehicles, as well as structural steel and other remnants of the original buildings.

Daniels has also helped raise more than $450 million from private sources to fund the construction of the memorial and museum, and he continues to fundraise to cover operating expenses. (While $250 million in federal funds and $80 million from New York State have been committed toward the official construction cost of $700 million, no government support has been forthcoming so far to cover ongoing costs.)

As promised in the ad for the job, there has been no shortage of challenges along the way—political, logistical, legal, emotional, economic, engineering, aesthetic, even natural (Superstorm Sandy flooded the site in 2012). But Daniels calls the experience "the privilege of a lifetime," finding inspiration in the dual mission of honoring the 2,983 who lost their lives and the millions who came together to support each other and rebuild.

Daniels grew up in Morristown, New Jersey, and majored in history at Washington University in St. Louis before heading to Penn Law School. After graduation, he practiced at Cravath, Swaine & Moore in Manhattan, representing private equity funds in their acquisition financing transactions. In 2000, he joined McKinsey & Company as part of their financial institutions group.

Before the planes hit the Twin Towers, Daniels was enjoying his focus on strategy and operations projects for investment and commercial banks. Afterward, there was no going back. "I knew I was done with what I was doing," he says. At first he went to work for the Robin Hood Foundation, which focuses on anti-poverty programs in New York and "had a reputation for hiring folks from McKinsey," he says.

Between 2001 and 2005, as plans for the 9/11 Memorial were taking shape and the infighting over who was going to build what where was ramping up (see, for example, *Battle for Ground* Zero, by Elizabeth Greenspan CGS'99 Gr'06 ["Arts," Nov|Dec 2013]), Daniels was occupied heading up the second phase of Robin Hood's Library Initiative, a $45 million pubic-private partnership to put libraries into underperforming New York City elementary schools.

In 2005, a friend from McKinsey told him about an opening at what was then called the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation and suggested he call the foundation's president, Gretchen Dykstra, commissioner for New York City's Department of Consumer Affairs as well as founding president of the Times Square Business Improvement District. "I knew Joe was a lawyer, that he had worked for a foundation and was familiar with raising money," recalls Dykstra, now a consultant to not-for-profits. "I hired him because I knew we needed a general counsel. He served me well."

But not for long. When Dykstra stepped down in May 2006, Daniels was asked to serve as acting president. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who became chair of the foundation's board in October of that year, made it official, naming Daniels president and CEO.

Anthoula Katsimatides, a foundation board member who lost her brother John on September 11, remembers Daniels describing Bloomberg's way of congratulating him on the appointment: "The mayor told him, 'Welcome to the team and don't mess this up,'" she says with a laugh.

In fact, by that point Daniels had already made significant strides in moving the project forward. When he came on board as counsel in 2005, the site was still, as he puts it, "an empty eight-acre pit," and mired in controversy.

One week earlier, *The Wall Street Journal* had run "The Great Ground Zero Heist," an op-ed written by Debra Burlingame, a member of the foundation board and sister of the pilot of American Airlines Flight 77, which was crashed at the Pentagon. The piece attacked the proposal to locate an International Freedom Center (IFC) on the WTC site, asserting that "rather than a respectful tribute to our individual and collective loss," such a center would

The 9/11 Memorial features two reflecting pools, each about one acre in size, set within the footprints of the Twin Towers. Waterfalls cascade down the sides of the pools.

provide "a slanted history lesson, a didactic lecture on the meaning of liberty in a post-9/11 world," with only a "strained, intellectual" connection to the events of that day.

"The public will have come to see 9/11 but will be given a high-tech, multimedia tutorial about man's inhumanity to man, from Native American genocide to the lynchings and cross-burnings of the Jim Crow South, from the Third Reich's Final Solution to the Soviet gulags and beyond," she wrote. "This is a history all should know and learn, but dispensing it over the ashes of Ground Zero is like creating a Museum of Tolerance over the sunken graves of the USS Arizona."

Plans for the IFC and a Drawing Center at the site were soon abandoned. This debate "confirmed once and for all that the entire eight-acre memorial quadrant of the World Trade Center site would be devoted to programming directly related to the memorial and 9/11 history," write Allison Blais and Lynn Rasic in *A Place of Remembrance*, the official book of the 9/11 Memorial.

With that issue settled, the first order of business, according to Daniels, was to craft an agreement between all the stakeholders that defined the building and funding responsibilities for each party with regard to the memorial and the museum. In addition to the foundation, those stakeholders included New York State, New York City, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (formed jointly by the city and state after 9/11 to help plan the memorial and the overall revitalization of the area and administer related federal funding). The agreement took a year to negotiate and was signed on July 6, which happens to be Daniels' birthday. Bloomberg called it a "key milestone" in the project that was "seminal" in breaking the logjam.

"The biggest thing we had to give up was direct control of construction, which we transferred to the Port Authority," Daniels notes. "Some board members who had backgrounds in construction objected, and it was tough at the time, but in the end it was the right decision."

There are 11 family members of 9/11 victims on the 51-member board. Now former Mayor Bloomberg remains as chair, although the quarterly meetings are no longer held at Gracie Mansion.

"Our meetings are never longer than an hour," says Katsimatides. "It is incredibly professionally run."

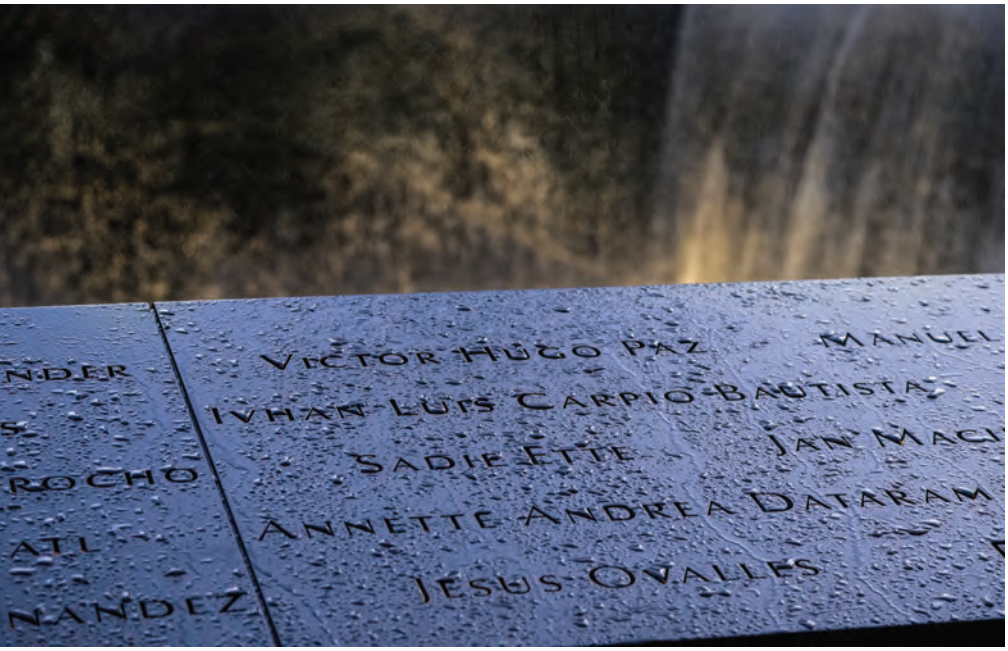
"We are a true working board," adds Burlingame. "There is lots of committee work, and the committees are very involved."

"The Foundation is an independent organization that represents the interests of the memorial," Daniels explains. "From the beginning, we made it clear that we will listen to everybody, but the board, in the end, will make the decisions. We take our mission very seriously."

The design for the memorial, "Reflecting Absence," by architect Michael Arad—who was selected in an international competition managed by the LMDC that attracted more than 5,200 entries from 62 countries—involves two reflecting pools, each about an acre in size, set in the footprints of the towers. Waterfalls cascade down the sides of the pools, and the names of the victims of the 2001 attacks and of the 1993 bombing of the WTC are inscribed on bronze parapets around the pools.

Construction on the memorial began in earnest in 2006 and continued for five years through numerous delays related to budget, design, and politics. It was a logistical and engineering puzzle that required daily coordination with the Port Authority. Besides the eight acres devoted to the memorial and museum,

the other half of the 16-acre World Trade Center site was (and remains) a mega-construction zone. Projects completed or under way include the Freedom Tower—at 1,776 feet, the tallest building in the country—and four other major skyscrapers with over 10 million square feet of office space, the city's third largest transportation hub; a new shopping venue; two new city streets; a performing arts center (now in design); and pedestrian walkways. Underground, the Port-Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) train and the 1 train subway line bisect the site. A portion of the memorial's south pool actually sits on top of the PATH tracks, which had to be kept operational once they were restored.



By 2008, the site was filled with steel beams and columns. Workers removed the 460-foot ramp that had enabled recovery and construction workers, as well as thousands of victims' family members, to access the bottom of the site. (The space where the ramp had once stood now contains steel for the memorial's south pool, and actual bedrock will not be accessible again until the museum opens.)

It was at this point that Daniels, together with Bloomberg and the foundation board members, made the decision to prioritize work on the memorial. "There were two things that [we] knew," he recalls. The first was that, on September 11, 2011, "the entire world would be looking to us and that we needed to deliver a memorial that our city and country could be proud of, and second, that because of the deep emotional commitment of everyone involved, we would be ready to meet that date."

One of the most challenging and time-consuming parts of the project had nothing to do with the actual construction, but rather with the arrangement of the names on the memorial. The concept of listing them alphabetically around the two cascading pools did not appeal to architect Michael Arad.

Bloomberg had suggested in 2006 that people be grouped according to where they were on that day—in the North or South Towers, or on the planes that crashed into them. In addition, in the arrangement that ultimately resulted, the names of the six people who perished in the 1993 WTC attack, when a car-bomb was exploded in the North Tower, were placed there, while first responders and passengers on the planes that crashed at the Pentagon and in rural Pennsylvania would be included around the South memorial pool.

But the question remained of *how* to list those names around their respective pools. "One of the biggest messages of the memorial and the museum is that the people who got up and did whatever they did that morning, and then died doing it, were no different from the rest of us," Daniels says. "They were us; we are them." The board agreed on the concept of "meaningful adjacencies" meant to, as Daniels says, "take something that is completely random and infuse it with a deeper level of meaning."

In 2009, the 9/11 Memorial staff sent packages of information to the victims' families. Besides verifying correct spelling and affiliation, they asked for specific names that people wanted listed next to their loved ones. They also worked with the New York medical examiner's office, victims' family groups, architects and planners of the Pentagon and Flight 93 memorials, representatives from responder agencies, and corporations that had lost employees on 9/11. They received about 1,200 requests, including from organizations such as Cantor Fitzgerald, the brokerage firm that lost 658 people in the attack, and the more than 400 first responders who wanted to be listed with their colleagues.

Among the heart-wrenching reasons underlying requests for grouped listings were stories of entire families who died together on Flight 175, which crashed into the South Tower; brothers who died as first responders in different squads; and a group of teachers and schoolchildren from Flight 77, which crashed at the Pentagon, who were on their way to a National Geographic school trip to the Channel Islands.

It took two years and a specially designed algorithm to honor them all. But they did. Touch-screen kiosks placed around the pools allow visitors to find the location of the different names.

"We ended up recognizing first responders in a separate section where we list them by agencies, like Fire Department of New York, New York Police Department, or Port Authority Police Department, and the names follow heading for their units like Ladder 10," says Daniels. "We did not include rank or the number of years served, which caused a tremendous amount of pushback initially, but now has been embraced by everyone. We honor the loss of life equally."

As complicated, emotional, and lengthy as the process of deciding on the arrangement of the names was, it serves as a model for how Daniels and the board do business.

"Part of the difficulty in Joe's job is telling the truth that people don't want to hear, and he can do that," notes Burlingame.

The names of 9/11 victims and those killed in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing are cut into the bronze parapets around the memorial pools. The entrance pavilion to the 9/11 Museum, the only aboveground part of the facility, can be seen in the background.

At the same time, according to board member Virginia Bauer, whose husband was killed in the attack, he has a softer side. "Joe is able to facilitate a lot of strong personalities while having a gentle way about him," she says.

Katsimatides agrees. "I don't remember the first time I thought, 'My brother's memory is in such good hands,'" she says. "Not only does he hear me, I feel like he feels my urgency, my angst, my nervousness, and the love I had for my brother, almost as if he had lost his. This is true of the entire staff, but that is because of Joe's leadership."

On September 11, 2011, the memorial opened in a private ceremony for family members. "To be on the memorial with the families on 9/11 that year—to see a child, parent, a widow, a brother or a sister touch the name of their loved one and realize that name, inscribed in bronze, will be here until the end of time—was something that could not have been more meaningful. In a moment, it truly made this challenging project worthwhile," Daniels told *Leadership Magazine.* The following day, the memorial opened to the public and has had more than 11 million visitors to date.

In late March it was announced that the 9/11 Museum would open to the public on May 21, preceded by a dedication period from May 15-20 during which the museum will be open 24 hours per day to 9/11 families and survivors, rescue and recovery workers, first responders from agencies that lost members in the attack, and Lower Manhattan business owners and residents.

Visitors will descend by ramp to the bedrock on which the Twin Towers were originally constructed. "While most museums are buildings that house artifacts, the 9/11 Memorial Museum is literally housed *within* an artifact," says Museum Director Alice Greenwald, who joined the foundation a few months after Daniels.

Divided into three parts, the museum tells the story of what happened that day, the events leading up to it, and how it has affected our lives since.

Among the most dramatic artifacts included in the collection are two massive steel tridents in the entrance pavilion that were part of the Twin Towers' façade; the Vesey Street Stair (known as the "Survivors Stairs") used by hundreds to escape to safety on 9/11; a preserved portion of the original World Trade Center slurry wall that kept the Hudson River out of the site; and the 36-foot-high "Last Column" covered with mementoes, inscriptions, and missing posters that was removed from the site on May 30, 2002, marking the end of the nine-month Ground Zero recovery effort.

Also included are examples from the outpouring of memorial gestures—posters, candles, stuffed animals, flowers, photographs, religious items, pictures of missing persons—that began within hours of the attacks, in Union Square (then as close as one could get to the site) and at fire and police stations across the city.

The museum highlights some of these tributes, including a four-foot tall ceramic urn, incorporating the names of all victims, made by ceramicist Tony Lane; the Flight 175 Memorial Quilt fashioned from old uniforms of United flight attendants, in loving memory of their colleagues who lost their lives; and Lady Liberty, a 10-and-a-half-foot tall polyurethane model of the Statue of Liberty that "appeared" one morning outside the firehouse on Eighth Avenue and 48th Street and spontaneously became garbed in tributes from people around the world.

In keeping with the project's contentious history, there have been a number of controversies surrounding the exhibits.

"Between 50 to 200 people were forced to jump [from the towers], and we debated whether or not we should include images of this," Daniels says. "In the end, the board felt that the difficult content had to be included." Similarly, the board decided to show photographs of the perpetrators. "We worked carefully to ensure both of these are done in a very sensitive way that acknowledges how difficult the content is."

In another example that has generated lots of media attention, a group called American Atheists sought to have the "miracle cross," a steel T-beam that emerged from the wreckage in the middle of the fires that burned for 99 days, removed from the Museum. In March, US District Court Judge Deborah Batts rejected the argument. "No reasonable observer would view the artifact as endorsing Christianity," she wrote. "[The museum curators] have not advanced religion impermissibly, and the cross does not create excessive entanglement between the state and religion."

Daniels is elated with the decision. "It's such an important part of this recovery period where people worked all day and night for nine months to help clean up and rebuild," he notes. "This cross that emerged from the pile provided some brief spirituality in the chaos of Ground Zero."

The lives of those who perished on September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993 are commemorated in a memorial exhibition. A gallery with portraits of the victims includes rotating displays of personal artifacts. Touch-screen tables allow visitors to learn about each person, and an inner chamber presents profiles of individual victims through photographs, biographical information, and audio remembrances provided by family and friends.

Between the two tower footprints, at bedrock, is a private repository, operated and maintained by the medical examiner's office, for unidentified remains; it is connected to a private area where only family members are admitted. The wall separating it from the public space bears a quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid*, forged in steel from the WTC: "No day shall erase you from the memory of time."

The museum's third section is devoted to the impact of 9/11 in the context of time. It covers the nine-month rescue and recovery effort and takes visitors up to the present, exploring broad questions such as balancing civil liberties with national security. There is also a special exhibitions gallery with revolving exhibits as well as a 167-seat auditorium. At the end of the exhibits, visitors take an escalator up to the lobby, which is still below ground level, and then another to the surface, moving into the light and the open plaza of the memorial.

Greenwald estimates an in-depth visit will take about two-and-a-half hours, although one could certainly do it in less time. They are expecting between 2.2 and 2.6 million museum visitors a year and plan to be open every day. The historical exhibition is recommended for ages 11 and older.

"I think we have a human obligation to remember what happened," says Greenwald, who came to the directorship from a position at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. "You can't understand the century we are living in without understanding this event. It teaches you about the best part of human nature in the face of the worst."

IN the months leading up to the opening, Daniels has been focusing primarily on fundraising.

The National September 11 Memorial and Museum is pursuing federal support as part of an ongoing public-private partnership to ensure its future. "We are exploring all options," he says. "Washington is a tough place to get money these days, and we have made it clear that we do not want to be a federal museum. We are seeking federal funds to help offset operating and security costs, and we are also continuing to fundraise from private sources."

Another major source of operating revenues is expected to come from museum admissions. There is no charge to visit the memorial (donations of $5-$10 are suggested), but it was announced in January that entry to the Museum would cost $24. (There will be no charge for 9/11 families and rescue and recovery workers at any time, and everyone will be able to get in free from 5-8 p.m. on Tuesdays; senior citizens, student, and other discounts will also apply.)

Twin Tower "tridents," originally part of the building façade, stand in the museum's atrium.

The steep cost, comparable to museums like the Metropolitan ($25) and Guggenheim ($22), raised protests, including from some relatives of 9/11 victims. Daniels understands the sentiment, but is unapologetic.

"The 9/11 Memorial does not yet receive government support for ongoing operations as many other important museums of our national history do," he said in a statement when the news was announced. "A general admission ticket of $24 will help fulfill our obligation to commemorate and preserve the history of 9/11. It will also enable educational programming that will teach the nature of and responsibility for the special freedoms we have," as well as ensure that admission to the memorial continues to be free.

Costs to operate the memorial and museum will run about $60 million annually, Daniels says. "We anticipate admissions from the museum to provide one half to one third of our revenue for operations."

While Daniels admits the challenges sometimes keep him up at night and that he goes through a lot of Tums, he has no plans to jump ship anytime soon. There is a part of him that feels like everything he has done in his life prepared him for this pressure and privilege. "Studying the law, working at Robin Hood, even being part of a consulting team [at McKinsey], are all important for the work I do here," he says.

"I've heard a lot of people say, 'Everything I've done in my life prepared me for this," Burlingame notes. "People gravitate to what they know. But in the end, who has experience for this? It was what they call *sui generis* in the law. There were no precedents; what the city, state, country had to do was truly unique.

"It's not just stuff on a resume that proves people can do magnificent things—it is who they are. Joe is a great man, and I don't think he has an enemy anywhere."◆

Kathryn Levy Feldman LPS'09 writes frequently for the *Gazette* and—full disclosure—is distantly related to Joe Daniels. (He's married to her husband's second cousin).