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9/11: Three years since the attacks

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Helping: From left, Iris Jackman, Alexis Kushner and Naomi Salomon assemble school supplies for poor children in New York City. It's a project of the Brooke Jackman Foundation, created in memory of a 9/11 victim.

Sept. 11 families build foundations of hope

Financial outpouring now funds good works

By Martha T. Moore
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — For six months after her son died at the World Trade Center, Liz Alderman could barely speak of him, let alone decide how to memorialize him.

While Peter's friends planted a copper beech tree in the family's yard in Pound Ridge, N.Y., his parents considered funding a scholarship or building a small park. Then one night, she saw on TV a way to remember her son and move forward with her life.

The death of the Aldermans' youngest child, a 25-year-old salesman for Bloomberg's electronic-trading service, was worth \$1.5 million, according to the federal victims

compensation fund set up after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Peter's parents put the entire amount into a program that trains doctors to treat victims of mass violence in countries like Rwanda, Cambodia and Bosnia. It is led by the man Liz Alderman saw on *Nightline*: psychiatrist Richard Mollica, director of a refugee trauma program at Harvard.

Saturday will be three years since the attacks. The Peter C. Alderman Foundation is one way the financial outpouring for families of the nearly 3,000 people killed on 9/11 is flowing back into the world. Hundreds of foundations and scholarships memorialize those who died, created by their families to benefit causes and people.

Peter's foundation helps people like him who are victims of terror, his mother says. "These are people who are ... in one manner of speaking, dead," she says.

Cover story

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Mom's motivation: 'I want to leave an indelible mark that he was here'

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"These are mothers who cannot take care of their children. These are fathers who cannot take care of their families. If we can bring these people back — we can't do that for Peter."

The family of Brooke Jackman, 23, an assistant bond trader, raised \$300,000 last year for literacy programs, including books for children living in New York City homeless shelters.

The entire \$50,000 pension that Shelley Marshall, 37 and the mother of two, will never collect from her administrative job at the Pentagon is funding high school art workshops and library story hours in West Virginia.

Golf tournaments in memory of Eddie Strauss, 44, who was director of World Trade Center operations, have raised \$71,000 to buy equipment for people with Lou Gehrig's disease.

USA TODAY has identified more than 130 charitable efforts, from \$200 essay prizes to multimillion-dollar foundations, started by families of those killed on 9/11. Most are scholarships: from St. Joseph-by-the-Sea High School on Staten Island (in memory of Joey Doyle, 25, a Cantor Fitzgerald employee),

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to the prestigious research institution Rockefeller University (in memory of Shaheed Hamdani, 23, a research technician who went to the Trade Center to put his emergency medical skills to use).

But the giving by families also includes a Fulbright scholarship to study in Malaysia, a program of geological walks in Ithaca, N.Y., a \$500,000 pledge for a new library in Piermont, N.Y., the cost of heart surgery for children from overseas and camps for bereaved children.

Countering rumors of greed

For the family members who work on them, these projects are a way to derive meaning from a deeply painful loss. They are a way to show gratitude for help from neighbors and friends after the attacks. And they are a way to rebut the whispers that 9/11 families are rich and greedy.

"You try to figure out what to do in order to help your own healing," says Nikki Stern, executive director of Families of September 11 and the widow of James Potorti, 52, a geologist-turned-insurance executive, who died at the Trade Center. In August, she gave \$10,000 to the Museum of the Earth in Ithaca to provide free guided walks through spectacular gorges. "Because that's what we did," Stern says.

Perhaps the largest and best-known family charity was founded by Lisa Beamer, whose husband,

Corrections & Clarifications

USA TODAY is committed to accuracy. To reach us, contact Reader Editor Brent Jones at 1-800-872-7073 or e-mail accuracy@usatoday.com.

In some editions Thursday, National Rifle Association official Wayne LaPierre was misidentified. He is executive vice president of the NRA.



Honoring Steve: Greg Hoffman on the green at a golf tournament held in memory of his twin brother, Steve, who died at the World Trade Center. The annual tournament benefits the Run to Daylight Education Program.

Todd, died on United Airlines Flight 93 when it crashed near Shanksville, Pa., after being hijacked. The foundation, now called Heroic Choices, has \$4 million in assets.

The giving by 9/11 families, even added together, is small in the world of philanthropy. But that doesn't really matter, says Kathleen McCarthy of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at the City University of New York.

"Small amounts of money aren't going to solve the world's problems, but they solve a lot of other problems, both in the community and to the people who are grieving," McCarthy says. "The short-term function is getting through the grief. ... These things do that."

The impulse these families share is to keep alive the name and qualities of someone who, to them, was the most special person in the world — to make good, if possible, come out of bad.

On the night his wife's body was found in the wreckage of the Pentagon, three days after the attack, a grief counselor told Donn Marshall, "The most important thing you can do is to give your sorrow meaning."

"It was like someone flipped a switch," Marshall says. He left his Pentagon job, moved his young children to his home state of West Virginia and now works full time on the Shelley A. Marshall Foundation. The organization funds art workshops and story hours and also holds intergenerational tea parties for high school students and nursing home residents.

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Memorial charities

Get information on more than 130 charities set up in the wake of 9/11 at usatoday.com

"I don't want (Osama) bin Laden to have the last word," Marshall says. "I wanted to give Shelley the last word, and these" — paintings by high school artists — "are some of her words."

To be sure, families often give money in someone's memory regardless of how that person died. But the scope of the Sept. 11 attacks was unprecedented in this country. So was the outpouring of money. More than \$2.4 billion in donations flooded relief organizations. The Sept. 11 Victim Compensation Fund was formed by the government to forestall massive lawsuits against the airlines whose jets were used. The median amount received by the families of those killed is \$1.68 million.

"Tragedies occur every day that don't get the financial support we got," says Ken Mannaeta, whose wife, Debbie, 31, worked in the World Trade Center. He quit his job as a New York police officer to stay home with their two girls. Now he gives an annual \$1,200 scholarship to the preschool his daughters attend. "We've been blessed in a very evil way."

Many families began their fundraising and charitable donations before receiving federal compensation. "Even before money was

Schedule of events

Ceremonies Saturday for the third anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks:

World Trade Center site
8:46 a.m. ET. Moment of silence at the time that the first jet struck the north tower. Parents and grandparents of victims start reading names of those killed.

9:03 a.m. Moment of silence (second jet hit south tower).

9:59 a.m. Moment of silence (fall of south tower).

10:29 a.m. Moment of silence (fall of north tower).

Sundown. "Tribute in Light" resembling the two towers.

Arlington National Cemetery

9:37 a.m. Moment of silence and wreath-laying ceremony.

Shanksville, Pa.

9:45 a.m. Memorial ceremony.

White House

8:46 a.m. Moment of silence on the South Lawn.

Live TV coverage
ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC.

distributed, there were certain families that immediately started doing things," says Ken Druck, a San Diego psychologist who runs a foundation for grieving families.

In some cases, money came in before families knew what to do with it. Barbara Jackman remembers donations arriving "from people who knew us, from people who didn't know us, who heard about it, who saw fliers around the city. People from all over the world were just writing in."

Families have different needs

Some families, like the Aldermans, are using money from the victims fund to finance their new work. Some are not.

Memorial organizations

Memorial foundations and scholarships mentioned in this article:

Peter C. Alderman Foundation: www.peteraldermanfoundation.org

Brooke Jackman Foundation: www.brookejackmanfoundation.org

Shelley A. Marshall Foundation: www.shelleysfoundation.org

Edward T. Strauss Memorial Fund: www.withdiedieshelp.org

Joseph Doyle Memorial Scholarship Fund: www.joeydoyle.com

Shaheed Mohammed Salman Hamdani Memorial Fund: The Rockefeller University, 1230 York Ave., New York, N.Y. 10021

Fulbright-Vijayashanker Memorial Scholarship Fund: www.macee.org.my (click "About the Fulbright Program")

Dennis P. McHugh Foundation (Piermont, N.Y. library): www.dennispmchughfoundation.org

Donald Richard Gavagan Fund (cardiac surgery for children): www.projectkidsworldwide.org/donate/gavagan.html

Scott Hazelcorn Children's Foundation (camp for bereaved kids): www.camphaze.org

James E. Potorti Museum of the Earth/State Park Gorge Walks: Museum of the Earth, 1259 Trumansburg Road, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Heroic Choices: www.beamerfoundation.org

Jason K. Jacobs Memorial Early Childhood Scholarship: Hebrew Academy of Morris County, 146 Dover Chester Road, Randolph, N.J. 07869; Westmont Montessori School, 577 Route 24, Mendham, N.J. 07945.

Lisa Frost Memorial Scholarship Fund: www.bu.edu/alumni/sha/giving/#lisa

Robert A. Rasmussen Memorial Trust: Leaders Bank, 2001 York Road, Suite 150, Oak Brook, IL 60523

Run to Daylight: www.queensfalcons.net/runtodaylight.htm

"Honestly, I would prefer not to have that money. The reality is, I have a small child to raise," says Jennifer Jacobs, the widow of Jason Jacobs, 32, who died in the World Trade Center. She has given \$30,000 for scholarships to the two preschools her daughter, Zoe, 4, has attended in Randolph, N.J.

Lisa Frost, 23, was flying from Boston to San Francisco for a new job when her jet crashed into the World Trade Center. Her parents have pledged \$70,000 to Boston University's hospitality management school for a wine-tasting room. It will be named for Lisa, who had just graduated.

Tom and Melanie Frost of Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif., also buy groceries for a food bank and have given financial help to Lisa's friends — a down payment on a house, a month's rent. But the \$1.4 million they received from the government is for their retirement.

"When Lisa graduated, she said,

"Someday, I'm going to take care of you.' And she is," says her father, who works for Southern California Edison. "We'd give every penny of it back if (Lisa) were (here). But that's not going to happen."

Two years after Anna Rasmussen's husband, Robert, died on a business trip to the World Trade Center, she learned their son, now 3, has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a fatal disease. "My little Sam, I thought he could be president of the United States. Now I just want him to live," his mother says.

The compensation fund money allows Rasmussen to work part time as a self-employed executive recruiter in Chicago. Two days a week, she raises money for the Robert A. Rasmussen Memorial Trust. She has pledged to raise \$50,000 a year for two years to hire a researcher to work on finding a cure for Sam's disease.

Downplaying the memories

As the anniversary of 9/11 arrives, families worry whether there will be a third, fourth and fifth year for their fundraisers, golf outings and causes. They wonder whether interest will dwindle, and whether their biggest fear — that their loved ones will be forgotten — will come true.

"Part of it depends on how good the party is," says McCarthy of the Center on Philanthropy. "If they serve an important need in the community, or if the fundraising event becomes important to the community, it may go on."

To make sure, families may have to downplay the very thing they hoped to perpetuate: the memory of the person they lost.

In March, the Todd Beamer Foundation changed its name to Heroic Choices and took Beamer's photo off its Web site. A consultant the foundation hired said fundraising would suffer otherwise. "We really needed to lock onto our mission, rather than continuously putting how the organization was formed first," says Alice Mae Britt, CEO of the foundation, which provides mental health programs for children.

Greg Hoffman discovered the same sad truth. His twin brother, Steve, who died at age 36 at the World Trade Center, coached a youth football team, the Queens Falcons. A golf tournament in Steve's memory raises money for the Falcons' educational program for disadvantaged kids, called Run to Daylight. So far, three tournaments have raised \$240,000 to construct a classroom building.

"Year One was all about being there for Steve," says Hoffman, of West Hempstead, N.Y. "Year Two, the focus of the thing is the Run to Daylight program." The team's leaders considered renaming the program after Steve but demurred. "We wanted to keep the focus on the kids," Hoffman says. "9/11, as time goes on, will wane."

And, Liz Alderman acknowledges, so will the memory of her son. "I don't believe you can keep someone's memory alive," she says. "Peter's memory is going to die out with the generation that heard him laugh or saw him smile." But for the son who didn't get to do it himself, "I want to leave an indelible mark that he was here."