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World Trade Center steel convoy heads to Lehigh Valley

28 rigs will carry 9/11 trade center relics back to Coatesville, where museum is planned. Follow live tweets of convoy's journey through the Lehigh Valley.

By Devon Lash

OF THE MORNING CALL "It's taken on much greater significance because it was never intended to come back," said Scott Huston, president of The Graystone Society in Coatesville. "It's a solemn remind

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In the making of steel, the production line runs one way.

But today, steel shipped from a Chester County plant decades ago to help build the World Trade Center will return to the town where it was forged.

To get there, it will pass through the Lehigh Valley, where the Lukens Steel plant in Coatesville was once linked to Bethlehem Steel.

"It's taken on much greater significance because it was never intended to come back," said Scott Huston, president of The Graystone Society in Coatesville. "It's a solemn reminder that everyone is picking up the pieces and moving on."

The society, a historical group, is overseeing the 9/11 relics' journey to a planned museum that will celebrate the triumph of American steelmaking.

A mile-long convoy of 28 tractor-trailers will carry 10 of the surviving steel supports that formed the base of the north tower to the city of Coatesville, where Lukens Steel created them in the 1960s, Huston said.

Leaving New York's Kennedy Airport at 5 a.m., the rigs will take the 500 tons of steel on Interstate 80 to Route 33 in the Poconos and south to I-78 west. Then they'll exit onto Route 29 (Cedar Crest Boulevard) next to Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest, Huston said.

So they'll be passing through the Lehigh Valley between noon and 1 p.m., he said.

From Route 29, the convoy will pick up Route 100 south, then travel to Route 30 west and arrive in Coatesville around 2 p.m., Huston said. Drivers might take alternative routes if there's an accident or heavy traffic, he added.

Organizers and drivers expect the convoy will attract a lot of attention and far surpass the average travel time



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for a 180-mile trip. On its arrival in Coatesville, where Lukens is now owned by steel giant ArcelorMittal, the convoy will be greeted with a procession and a ceremony.

But Huston said he hopes the spotlight will stay on the steel supports, called "trees," which will become the centerpiece of a planned National Iron and Steel Museum in Coatesville.

"It's about the life cycle of steel as well as remembering the victims and the survivors of 9/11," Huston said. Lukens' union workers proposed reclaiming the steel in 2001, a month after the terrorist attacks that leveled the twin towers. At the time, the plant was owned by Bethlehem Steel, which filed for bankruptcy that year.

The union produced Lukens' annual reports showing the plant's work for what became the world's tallest building when it was completed in 1972, said Huston, whose nonprofit historical group soon took up the cause.

The requests went unanswered for several years until the National Sept. 11 Memorial Museum and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owned the steel remnants, signed on in support, Huston said.

"There was a general, overall sense of the same feeling that occurred after 9/11. People really came together to get the job done," he said. "Let's move these pieces out of JFK [Airport], let's not forget this event happened."

Since then, the Port Authority has filled dozens of requests for pieces of the World Trade Center site.

Once the Graystone Society was granted possession of the pieces, the group faced roadblocks in transporting 500 tons of steel, Huston said. Even with some drivers volunteering, the daylong trip is costing at least \$150,000 in permits and fees. The money came from private donors.

With additional donations, Huston said the society plans to reassemble the steel supports, as well as the pieces of siding and two window sections from the north tower's 42nd to 44th floors, so the public can appreciate the steel as it once was.

The museum may be open to the public in time for the 10th anniversary of the attacks, he said.

The story of the steel -- from its production to its destruction to its salvage --- is an important and uniquely American story to tell, Huston said.

"It's a burden and a responsibility," he added.

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