**A serene place to remember 9/11's victims**

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By EMILY NGO.  Special to Newsday

Michael Iken loved the sound of falling water.

The 37-year-old [Massapequa](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Massapequa%2C_NY) bond trader killed at the [World Trade Center](http://www.newsday.com/topics/World_Trade_Center) would have appreciated the reflecting pools and waterfalls of the National 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan honoring him and nearly 3,000 other terror attack victims, said his widow, Monica Iken.

"I feel my Michael is now home. He's at peace," said Iken, 41, a memorial board member. "He hears water running every day. Words can't describe the sense of reverence and respect that's there."

The 8-acre commemorative plaza will be dedicated a month from Thursday in a 10th-anniversary ceremony to be attended by [President Barack Obama](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Barack_Obama), former President [George W. Bush](http://www.newsday.com/topics/George_W._Bush) and family members of 9/11 victims. It opens to public ticketholders on Sept. 12.

**A place to see the sky**

Newsday this week toured the site as dozens of workers put finishing touches on the memorial, which has been under construction since March 2006.

The initial access point will be at [Albany](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Albany%2C_NY) and Greenwich streets as work continues on the 9/11 Memorial Museum and new towers at [Ground Zero](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Ground_Zero).

As they enter, people might be startled to find themselves in a flat, serene stretch dotted with 400 oak trees that aim to filter city noise, said the memorial's architect, Michael Arad.

"You're walking through the dense urban forest of lower Manhattan into this clearing with trees, through narrow valleys into a big, open plain. It makes this place distinct that you can look up and see the sky," said Arad, 42.

Visitors will then see the spot where the south tower once stood. In its place is a sleek, square abyss. To the west is a sprawling lawn, a place to sit and reflect.

The focal points are the two reflecting pools and massive waterfalls around the deep, dark granite voids created in the footprints of the fallen Twin Towers.

**Symbol of merged stories**

Water falls from serrated edges into the void in tiny streams, meeting several feet below in the pools -- an effect that Arad said represents individuals' 9/11 tales merged into a shared story line.

A ring of bronze plaques around the south tower pool shows the names of the victims aboard [United Airlines](http://www.newsday.com/topics/United_Airlines) Flight 175, which hijackers crashed into it; [United Airlines](http://www.newsday.com/topics/United_Airlines) Flight 93, which went down in Shanksville, Pa.; and [American Airlines](http://www.newsday.com/topics/American_Airlines) Flight 77, which rammed into the [Pentagon](http://www.newsday.com/topics/The_Pentagon). It also bears the names of the trade center workers killed in the south tower, those who died at the [Pentagon](http://www.newsday.com/topics/The_Pentagon) and the first responders killed.

The waterfall, reflecting pool and ring of names are echoed at the footprint of the north tower a few yards away. The victims honored there are the workers killed in that tower; those aboard American Flight 11, which crashed into it; and six people killed in the 1993 trade center bombing. The cut-out names and the voids of the tower footprints reflect loss.

"It is about making visible what is no longer present. It is about making what is absent comprehensible," Arad said.

**Some families upset**

The names, cut through metal and illuminated at night with light from beneath, were among several points of controversy.

Some families are angry that the museum will be underground, with unidentified remains behind a wall, instead of in a more prominent place akin to the Tomb of the Unknowns.

"It's very hurtful," said FDNY Lt. [James McCaffrey](http://www.newsday.com/topics/James_McCaffrey), whose brother in-law Orio Palmer, 45, of [Valley Stream](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Valley_Stream%2C_NY), was never found. "Families are upset about [the facility being] 70 feet below ground. Some will never go there. They think it is disrespectful."

Memorial officials said the decision to put remains in the bedrock was guided by a coalition of 9/11 families.

Some families also say the first responders' ranks should have been listed on the plaques. "George should be remembered as a firefighter," said Rosemary Cain, of [Massapequa](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Massapequa%2C_NY), of her son, who died at age 35.

Memorial officials said specific units, such as engine company numbers, are inscribed, and several prominent national military and first-responder memorials also omit ranks.

The names were ultimately divided into nine groups, some placed with "meaningful adjacency," with which families requested that some victims' names be near those of their colleagues or loved ones.

When it opens Sept. 11, about 80 percent of the memorial will be accessible to the public, with the rest slated for completion in about two years. The museum is due to open in September 2012. Together, the museum and memorial cost $700 million.

"It's been a historic effort and it culminates in that moment when the families go and find the names of their loved ones," said memorial president [Joe Daniels](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Joe_Daniels).

Jimmy Boyle, whose firefighter son Michael, 37, of [Westbury](http://www.newsday.com/topics/Westbury%2C_NY), died Sept. 11, said: "I just hope that 50 years from now, 60 years from now, people can still go there to think about what happened, that my grandchildren can go there and remember their Uncle Michael."

With Anthony M. DeStefano