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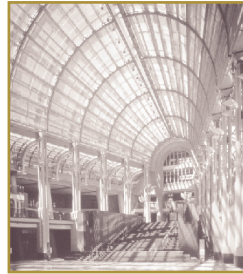
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Celebrating  
**40 Years**  
of TOPICS

## FLC Agenda Boasts Top-Rate Speakers



There is just over a month left to take advantage of early registration rates to attend AGA's 13th Annual Federal Leadership Conference at the International Trade Center—The Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. Slated for Jan. 24-25, 2002. The FLC will include presentations from former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Comptroller General of the United States David M. Walker and Paul Light of the Brookings Institute, to name a few. (See full agenda on p. 18.)

Register by Jan. 9 and AGA members pay just \$450 for two days of top-rate sessions worth 16 CPE hours. The nonmember rate is \$575. After Jan. 9, the conference fees increase by \$100. Save \$25 by registering online at [www.agacgfm.org/flc](http://www.agacgfm.org/flc)!

Federal government financial managers are expected to make accountability their top priority. This national conference is a must for anyone working on the front lines of government financial management and involved in overseeing the direction of their agencies. The conference theme, "Leading Transformation," will focus on how government financial professionals can lead positive change in their field. ■

## New York Chapter Members Recall Horror, Aftermath of September 11 WTC Attacks

When the first plane hit the World Trade Center on September 11, people working in lower Manhattan flocked to windows with a view, thinking there had been a terrible accident. Members of AGA's New York City Chapter were no different, and many saw the second plane hit the South Tower, realizing in an instant that this was no accident.

Gerald E. Bernstein, working seven blocks away, had gathered with his coworkers in their supervisor's office, which had the best view of the WTC complex. He described the fire at the North Tower as a burning hole in one side of the building with smoke coming out the other side. "It looked like confetti was coming down from the building," he said. "We thought it was an accident or something."

The impact of the second plane shook Bernstein's building like a "mini-earthquake." He added, "When the second plane hit, there wasn't any panic, but one of my coworkers said, 'This is terrorism, let's get out of here!'"

Bernstein, an auditor with the Environmental Protection Agency's Regional Office of Inspector General, said he did a "dumb" thing by crowding into an elevator to leave his 15th floor office in the 30-story building. "We shouldn't have done that," he said. "I wouldn't do that again."

With his building located just across the street from the 41-story Federal Plaza, the second largest federal building in the country (behind the Pentagon), Bernstein and others feared that the federal complex might be the next target. "I stayed with a coworker and our goal was to get away from the Federal Plaza," he said.

His objective then became finding a way out of New York City. A New Jersey resident, he worked his way around the city for more than seven hours before finding a train running to New Jersey. By that time he had made the acquaintance of another New Jersey commuter and between the two of them, they managed to get themselves on to the right train. The other man's wife met them and

*Remembering September 11, continued on page 16*

# REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11

*September 11, continued from cover*

drove Bernstein home. His story of strangers coming together to help each other was occurring throughout the city that day.

Bernstein said he has spent more than 90 percent of his career working in lower Manhattan, adding that he watched the Twin Towers go up in the early 1970s and is having trouble now accepting that they are gone. "I feel like they took a part of the city away from us," he said.

"I still haven't gotten over this," Bernstein said. "I am a little better than I was, but I still haven't gotten over it. I am still waiting for something else to happen here. I used to cut through the Twin Towers every day to catch my bus. It still depresses me."

## **A Well-Timed Sick Day**

Robert C. Stein, CGFM, the chapter's newsletter editor, was at home on September 11, recovering from a bad case of the flu. As Stein watched the scene unfold on TV, he was filled with fear about the safety of his many coworkers and friends in the city. "I was frantic," Stein said. "As best I could, I just kept calling and calling and calling. It wasn't until 3 p.m. that I managed to reach one of my coworkers."

Stein learned that all of his coworkers with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Regional Office of Inspector General had safely left their 37th floor office in Federal Plaza.

"For many years, we have been afraid that we could be a target," said Stein, who has worked for 15 years in the Federal Plaza building that also houses the regional offices of the FBI, the Social Security Administration and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to name a few.

Stein said that none of the chapter's 258 members appear to have been killed, but the chapter president, Jack Harrison, has not yet been able to contact all of the members. "We have not been able to reach everyone, but that does not mean they are missing," he said, noting that several of the

chapter's members worked for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Secret Service and the Customs Bureau, all of which were housed in the World Trade Center complex.

A native New Yorker and survivor of the 1993 WTC bombing (*see sidebar*), Stein has visited Ground Zero. "Oh my God," he said, "it looks like something out of World War II. It looks as if hell not only came to earth, but occupied it."

People who live and work in lower Manhattan are also grappling with the horrendous odor coming from the site. "A couple of days we had to shut down," Stein said. "The stench was unreal."

*"Oh my God, it looks like something out of World War II. It looks as if hell not only came to earth, but occupied it."*

## **Tales of Horror**

Evelyn Diaz, CGFM, a senior auditor in the same office as Stein's, was sitting at her computer with her back to a window facing the WTC when she heard the boom of the first plane hitting the North Tower. At first, she chalked it up to the construction going on upstairs, which had caused a lot of noise. When she heard one of the secretaries screaming, she turned and saw smoke coming from the North Tower. She and her coworkers were still standing at the window 20 minutes later when they saw a second jetliner approaching the South Tower from the East River. "It was very clear to us that that's where it was heading," she said.

Without waiting for any official order to evacuate—an order that never came—the staff grabbed their purses and jackets and fled the scene immedi-

ately after the second impact. "We thought there might be other planes coming after it," she said.

Diaz walked down the 39 floors with the same secretary who had been screaming. "She was convinced from the beginning that it wasn't an accident," Diaz said, adding that the evacuation down the stairs was very orderly considering the circumstances. Once outside, it took Diaz five hours to walk home to Brooklyn by way of the Queensboro Bridge, all the while unable to reach her family to let them know she was safe.

Jack Harrison, CGFM, a senior auditor with the Social Security Administration's Regional OIG and the chapter's president, told a similar story of disbelief and horror as he sat on the window sill of his 39th story office in Federal Plaza.

"Until the (second) plane banked toward the South Tower, we thought we were next," Harrison said, adding that the South Tower explosion was bigger and more intense close up than anything that was shown on TV.

After evacuating down the stairs, Harrison too walked over the Queensboro Bridge where he was able to get a bus to his Great Neck, Long Island home.

Harrison said the chapter had cancelled all events through Oct. 31, citing the relocation of many of its members to offices outside of the city. He said most of the chapter's activities took place in Lower Manhattan, including five seminars held last year at 6 WTC, which is now gone.

Like Stein and many others, Harrison often spent his lunch hours at the WTC, meeting old friends from his 19 years with the U.S. General Accounting Office. "To see your neighborhood, your stomping grounds, reduced to rubble is really traumatic," he said.

Harrison extended his thanks to the many AGA members as well as professional colleagues who have contacted him since the attacks to check on fellow members and friends.

*September 11, continued on next page*

# REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11

September 11, continued from previous page

## The Aftermath

The offices in the Federal Plaza building, like many in that area, were shut down for nearly two weeks after the attacks. Six weeks later, however, workers were still grappling with technology and phone issues, since the local phone network hub run by Verizon was destroyed when the WTC collapsed.

Getting these offices back up and running has been a huge task, which involved cooperation in many cases with agency home offices in Washington, D.C.

Dennis J. Duquette, CGFM, deputy inspector general for management and policy with HHS, is in charge of making sure auditors in the regional offices have the hardware, software and connectivity they need to perform their jobs. Duquette said that his agency's lead IT person in New York, Dave Parsons, supervised the installation of a separate server so the agency staff could at least have access to e-mail while the phone service was interrupted. Duquette praised the efforts of Parsons and his crew, who installed the new server over a weekend.

*"I am very angry that this has been done to us—not just to us, New York—but to us as a country."*

"We've got 85 people in the office up there," Duquette said in mid-October, "and we still have only a few phone lines."

The far greater concern, Duquette said, is the psychological effect on people who saw the explosions, saw people falling from the towers, saw people on fire and other horrors that day. The agency is working to help those people who are still dealing with the trauma. "Our

people were close enough that they watched it," he said. "We had a lot of people who were traumatized and so they need counseling."

Duquette said that a construction accident that occurred nearly six weeks after the attacks near the HHS's New York offices caused a huge boom, which sent people running down 40 flights to get out of the office. "When they found out it was nothing, many of them wouldn't go back in," he said.

"It is very nerve-wracking," Diaz said. There have been bomb threats and suspicious envelopes as well as continued construction that creates the noise Duquette referred to. "The military presence all over the city both helps and doesn't help," she added.

Those interviewed all believe that New York, and the country, will recover but there are still a lot of raw nerves

## AGA Member Survived '93 WTC Bombing; Hopes City Rebuilds

Bob Stein's lunchtime routine inevitably led him six blocks from his office to the stores, restaurants and bank housed in and under the World Trade Center. He was in the bank under the North Tower when a bomb went off under the South Tower in February of 1993.

"The enormous amount of explosives shook the entire complex," he recalled. "I felt it and I heard it. The lights went out, the earth shook. It was an ear-splitting sound like a sonic boom. It was as if a jet plane had flown right by me."

Stein remembers two reactions among the people he encountered immediately after the blast—there was either complete panic and screaming or total numbness. Stein fell into the latter category as he joined the throngs of people flooding out of the buildings—many of them without jackets in the bitter cold.

"They just ran out," he said. "The choice was that you would rather freeze than be killed."

What Stein remembers most were the eyes of the people fleeing the scene. "I will never forget the wide eyes of frenzied panic," he said. "It just chills me to this day."

It took Stein nearly eight months before he could go back to the World Trade Center after the bombing. Soon he was going back more and more regularly, eventually getting back to an almost daily routine of spending his lunch hour somewhere in the World Trade Center.

This past August, Stein organized a lunch outing to the World Trade Center with a group of coworkers. They each bought their lunch and brought it out to the Plaza where they listened to a jazz concert.

He was also a frequent visitor to the Borders bookstore in the mall under the World Trade Center. He didn't know the names of all the employees he saw almost every day, and so he doesn't know their fate after the September 11 attacks. "I just hope and pray they got out," he said.

While Stein advocates rebuilding the Towers, he mourns what all New Yorkers have lost. Losing the Towers, he said, has "really torn the heart out of lower Manhattan." ■

by Marie S. Force

among those who must report to work in lower Manhattan every day.

"I am very angry that this has been done to us—not just to us, New York—but to us as a country," Diaz said.

Stein is confident that the city and the nation will recover. "The day will come—and I hope it's soon—when we can rebuild," Stein said. "We will rebuild this. That to me is very important. Whatever the development is will give peace of mind. Most of all, we need a memorial so that we never forget what happened." ■

by Marie S. Force