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Paul Philo / Mike Albano

Bush talks yesterday with Robin Freund, whose husband, a firefighter, is missing.

He Brings Solace Second Time Around

By Ron Howell

STAFF WRITER

President George W. Bush went to a firehouse in Little Italy yesterday and restored some comfort to aching souls.

People in the area said New York would benefit greatly if the nation's commander-in-chief would visit more frequently.

Five firefighters from the Broome Street station were missing after they apparently rushed into Tower One of the World Trade Center just minutes after it was hit by a hijacked airliner.

Just two days ago, the body of one firefighter, Faustino Apostile, was identified after being pulled from the rubble, said firefighter John Olivero. The other four remain missing.

Olivero, who said he has cried a river of tears since the attacks, said spirits at the fire station were revived yesterday as Bush ate pizza and laughed along with firefighters and grieving relatives of the missing.

"It's very reassuring. It has a strong impact on all of the guys," Olivero said.

Bush paid special attention to Robin Freund, wife of missing Lt. Peter Freund. He told her how beautiful her children were, that he was praying for the whole family, and that the country appreciated her husband's courage, Robin Freund said later.

Freund said she was still in unspeakable pain. She praised her husband, 46, as a hero who "gave his life to save other people."

According to those who ate pizza with them,

Bush lightened the mood somewhat when he asked one of Freund's children where he was planning to go to college. When the boy said Harvard University, Bush, a Yale graduate, said, "Wrong choice."

Before visiting the fire station Bush met with business executives at Federal Hall in the Wall Street area, discussing how to revive the economy in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. In Chinatown, he also spoke briefly about patriotism to first-graders and kindergartners at PS 130.

Among those who strongly felt Bush ought to come back to New York more regularly were the owners of Sal's pizza shop on Broome Street, which prepared the firehouse luncheon.

"If he came back a couple more times it would do wonders for the city," said Peter Arnone, a relative of the owners and the guy who keeps the books at Sal's. "His presence is like saying, 'It's safe. We need to stimulate business.' If he starts coming back, then a lot of other people will start coming back."

Business at Sal's, which dropped 70 percent in the week after the attacks, was back to its normal level yesterday, Arnone said.

The man who made the five presidential pizzas yesterday was Francesco Triolo. "An FBI agent was watching me the whole time I was doing it," he said, still beaming with pride later in the day. "He was a very nice guy, but he didn't let his eyes off for a minute. It was the first time I made pizzas under surveillance."

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