NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

THE NEW YORK POST, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2001



RESCUE TEAM: Ironworkers cut through debris in search for victims the other day. Sam Costanza

HARDHATS SHOULDER A BIG BURDEN

By SALLY JENKINS

They tramp into the smoke and dust, a legion of volunteer laborers wearing hard hats and tool belts and thick-soled boots.

Hours later they walk out again, looking for fresh gloves and dry socks, or a sandwich, which they eat standing up. They crave food and batteries.

The men who normally power and run this city, the lawyers, brokers and financiers, are useless.

You can tell this by their papers, which have been blown to bits, those formerly crucial documents, so wordy and so thick, that they stuffed in their briefcases.

What's left of the World Trade Center is a heap of twisted steel and ruined brick, substances with which many powerful New Yorkers have no experience. A building to them is something to walk through or ride up.

The rest of us don't know where or how to begin, but the impromptu volunteer army of workers does.

"We built this city, you know," said Robert Doremus, 36, a carpenter from The Bronx.

They come in carrying saws and wrenches, spades and other tools.

They drive loaders, excavators, backhoes and buildozers. They commit grand acts of improvisation and problem-solving.

"Every tradesman in New York is here," said carpenter Frank McCluskey of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. "All the construction jobs have ceased."

The term "laborers" has a new respectability among their fellow citizens.

Much has been said about the brotherhood of police and firemen working tirelessly in the rescue and salvage operation, but alongside them, the volunteers have worked just as heroically and with a similar sense of brotherhood.

"We had a lot of our own guys in there. We lost scores of men who were working on jobs," said McCluskey, of Eastchester. "Carpenters lost people. Electricians lost people. For us, it's personal." *Washington Post*

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