NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

Donors eye WTC families

Find difficulty in steering gifts to overlooked civilians

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A Long Island lawyer called wanting to pay the mortgage of a struggling widow.

Through tears, the wife of a firefighter asked if her relatives in Minnesota could send toys to a civilian family.

Although more than $1 billion has poured in for relief efforts following the Sept. 11 attacks, people still want to give — particularly after the Daily News reported this week that some families of civilian victims were feeling overlooked, even though more than 85% of those killed were civilians.

"I'd love to directly help somebody," said Larry Rogak, 44, of Oceanside, L.I., who wants to help pay a widow's mortgage. "I can't save the whole world, just a little piece."

"I know police and fire are well covered," added Dan Severin, 50, a Nassau County homicide detective who donated to a police and fire widows and orphans fund, but also wants to give $1,000 to a civilian widow for the holidays.

"I want to see it go directly to someone in need," he said.

Earmarking donations

One problem confronting some of those with good intentions is that donors to organized charities can't directly earmark their gift for specific families, and there are plenty of survivors who haven't been in the news but need help. By law , "You can't give a gift to a nonprofit organization with the direction that it fund a specific private individual," said Pat Foster, director of development for the Salvation Army of New York City.

The Salvation Army allows people to donate money for families, whose general needs are shared but whose names are not. The Red Cross has a special fund for the Sept. 11 attacks.

But Pegeen Nelson, 36, a legal secretary whose office overlooks Ground Zero, has told her husband she wants to use her gift money to buy groceries and toys for 34-year-old Denise Matuza and her three young kids. Matuza lost her husband, Walter, in the World Trade Center and has been struggling to pay her bills.

"It's what everybody should be doing. It's Christmas," Nelson said.

Group's unwanted role

Continuing offers of assistance have put the leaders of Give Your Voice, a group representing civilian families, in a bind because they want survivors to get help, but don't want the group to handle the money.

"We don't want to turn away help, but this isn't something we intended to do," said Give Your Voice co-founder Marie Granieri, 35, of New Hyde Park, L.I. "We need help from a charity that's independent and small, [one] that's fast enough to get the money to families that need it."

Mayor Giuliani spent three hours with representatives of civilian families this week and said he'd assign case workers to help.

The mayor will meet with them again on Monday.

HELPING OUT

The two largest charities dedicated to the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks are stepping up their distribution of aid:

LIBERTY FUND		SEPTEMBER 11TH FUND
American Red Cross	ORGANIZER	United Way of New York City, New York Community Trust
$603 million	COLLECTED	$340 million
$191 million	DISBURSED	$65 million
$275 million	YEAR-END DISBURSEMENT GOAL	$140 million

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