

## Legacy Groves of Somerset County

## Trees as Living Memorials Nurture the Human Spirit

**The Challenge**

The events of September 11, 2001, had an enormous impact not only on the victims of terrorism and their families, but on the communities in which they happened. Memorials have been established or are planned for each crash site in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington DC. In Somerset County, Pennsylvania, there was also a desire to create living places of beauty that not only honor those lost, but provide a sanctuary where people can reconnect themselves to life.

Somerset County is a bucolic collection of small towns in southwestern Pennsylvania. The citizens of these towns feel a strong connection to where they live and with the people around them. On September 11, 2001, Flight 93 crashed in a field near Windber, Pennsylvania. Local fire and police units worked cooperatively to respond to this tragedy. Volunteers from the community rallied to provide support to the family and friends of the victims. The citizens of Somerset County mourned the events of September 11 with the rest of the world, but they also rose to the challenges of that day directly and successfully.

The spirit of community and volunteerism is enormous in these small towns. The county commissioners, the Kiski Basin Initiative, and the USDA Forest Service combined forces to find a way to capture this spirit and honor it, to provide a reminder about the importance of community, and to offer a setting of solace and rejuvenation.

**The Solution**

In the aftermath of September 11, Congress directed the USDA Forest Service to create a Living Memorial Project to provide resources and information about living memorials to communities near the crash sites. A living memorial may be any number of things, ranging from a single tree to a forest of trees.

*Trees symbolize the continuity of life and reflect hope for the future.*



*Somerset County firefighters place a wreath at the Legacy Grove dedication on September 11, 2003.*

The Legacy Groves of Somerset County is envisioned as a wide network of living memorials – groves of sugar maple trees interwoven across the landscape. The first installments were planted at the Volunteer Firefighters Training Center and the Somerset County Vocational Technical School on September 11, 2003. It is hoped that these groves will inspire others throughout the county to create new groves in other meaningful locations.

**Resulting Benefits**

*Respond, Reflect, and Renew* are the three benefits that these living memorials seek to elicit. Somerset County is a hallmark of volunteerism in America. Mutual caring and trust among community members accomplished so much during those tragic days and still continues today. Through the subtle presence of the Legacy Groves, community members will be able to remember the valiant response of the community, reflect on the significance of events at both local and global levels, and renew their spirits for the future.

**Sharing Success**

Using trees in a living memorial symbolizes the continuity of life and reflects hope for the future. The Living Memorials Project affirms the principle that nurturing other living things helps restore and provide solace for the human spirit.



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