

Roman Al Davis Unveils Memorial Bricks At The New York State Fair

ROME – On August 28, 1984, Al Davis, a building services employee at Rome Memorial Hospital, entered active military duty in Oklahoma. His inspiration to enter the Army came from singer Lee Greenwood's popular anthem, *"I'm Proud to be an American."*

Nineteen years later to the day, Davis was given the privilege of paying tribute to active military units who participated in 9/11 and the Afghanistan and Iraqi conflicts in a commemorative ceremony at the New York State Fair. Amazingly enough, Lee Greenwood performed nearby at the Cole Muffler court. Davis could hear the sound of the familiar song ringing through the fairgrounds.

"It was kind of eerie," said Davis. "During the ceremony, I realized that it was 19 years to the day that I had entered military duty. And then to hear Lee Greenwood sing that song....it was very popular around the time that I entered the military. They say that history has a way of repeating itself. Well it certainly did that day."

Davis said that members of the military stood in line to meet Lee Greenwood and get his autograph. "He saluted every uniformed soldier that came up to him," he said.

Davis is a sergeant first class with the 1st Battalion 3rd Infantry Regiment and was chosen, with Major David Colvin and Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Lambert from the same regiment, to be part of the memorial ceremony. Military units were honored with the unveiling of bricks listing their divisions.

"It made me feel really privileged to show honor and respect to the families and soldiers who responded at 9/11 and our country as a whole," said Davis. "We all lost something that day, whether it was our innocence or our security."

"On August 22, Al Davis came to my office and told me he had a great day," said Rome Memorial Hospital Building Services Department Manager Gail VanEtten. "He said he had received a surprise call asking him to participate in a special event," she added. He explained to VanEtten the series of events that lead him to this special honor.

Davis said that he was deployed during 9/11 to help with security and search and rescue efforts. "My unit provided security relief to one of the supply distribution sites," said Davis. The site was for storage and distribution of the many medical supplies used to treat 9/11 victims.

Davis said that when he entered the distribution center, the room was filled with banners that said "God Bless You" and "We Wish You Well" from strangers -- yet somehow

friends -- from all over the country — Houston ... Spokane, Washington ... Los Angeles ... small towns in the Mid-west. “It still makes me teary-eyed to think about it,” he said. One of his former search and rescue students in the military, who was also a New York City police officer, was one of the many people lost that day. Unfortunately, Davis stated quietly, he never came out of one of the Twin Towers as he tried to rescue others.

In addition to his responsibilities as a sergeant first class, Davis is the only qualified advanced search and rescue instructor in Central New York. He is also the Equal Opportunities Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Leadership Education Coordinator for new NCOs and was selected as New York State NCO of the Year in 1996.

He has been with the New York Guard since 1996. He served in the United States Army for six years, working as Nuclear Weapons Security Specialist and then with the United States Marine Corps for two years, working as crash & fire rescue specialist and aircraft fire fighter until receiving medical discharge.

Davis and his wife Rhonda reside in Rome with their two children. They are expecting twins in October and Al is very well aware that his twins could be born early. “My wife and I talk about it and we realize that the babies could be born on 9/11,” he said. “There are some people who are tall in my family and I tell her that our two tall towers will not be brought down so easily,” he said with a smile.