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South Hadley runners honor Sept. 11 hero

By **CATHERINE BAUM**
Staff Writer

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Saturday, September 27, 2008

SOUTH HADLEY - Seven years later, the tragedy of 9/11 still hits close to home here.

This weekend, local firefighters and other town employees are off to New York to remember the firefighters who died in the place they lost their lives.

Members of the town's Fire Department plan to participate in the "Tunnel to Towers Run" Sunday in New York City. Fire Capt. James Pula, retired Fire Chief David Daly, Prudential Committee Chairman Raymond Hopfe, and firefighters Joseph Scott, Donald McKenzie and Jason Houle are the first group from the town's Fire Department to participate in the event. Detective Mark Dominick and Capt. Brian McLaughlin, of the town's Police Department, will return to the event.

The run is held annually to support the pediatric unit of the New York City Firefighter Burn Center and burn centers throughout the country.

The five-kilometer walk/run honors the heroic work of firefighter Stephen Siller, who ran through the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel to the World Trade Center to help with the rescue on Sept. 11, 2001.

Siller, who was on his way to golf with his three older brothers as he was off-duty that day, perished in the collapse of the towers. The husband and father of five had heard on the scanner that the World Trade Center was hit, prompting him to turn around and head toward the chaos.

Traffic was prohibited on the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel at the time, so Siller, with his gear strapped to his back, got out of his truck and ran to the site.

The run retraces Siller's footsteps on the day he lost his life. Nearly 20,000 people from all over the world are set to attend the event, which honors his memory and the memory of all the public safety workers who performed their duties that day.

"When you enter that tunnel you hear that cadence from the footsteps; you hear that echo when they start yelling USA in the tunnel," Dominick said of the run.

He said the moment raises the hair on one's neck.

Upon exiting the tunnel, participants pass by 343 firefighters who are each holding a picture of one of the firefighters killed that day.

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.

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