

Lessons of September 11

By David Shaffer

As we all have been reflecting on the 10th Anniversary of the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001, I have come to the realization that most of our students were too young to experience the impact of these historic events as it directly affected all of us who witnessed the coverage of the attacks and their aftermath. I want to ask our students to consider some of the ways our society has been changed by these incidents. For most of our students the changes in our society have been what they have always known.

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, on the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and the hijacked commercial plane that crashed in Shanksville, PA have demonstrated to all Americans that we must remain on guard against an enemy whose members are willing to give up their lives in attacks that are aimed at the citizens within our own country. This enemy does not declare war through a national government, does not dress in a uniform, and does not openly carry on a type of warfare with a defined army and navy. Therefore, it is a different type of warfare than we have ever faced as a nation.

How are the lives of the students of Brown County Schools different after September 11, 2001? First, public schools including Brown County operate on a heightened state of alert. While this is partly caused by the highly publicized incidents of school violence over the past 15 years, it is also a function of terrorism and September 11. All of our school buildings are now accessible to the public by making initial contact with our office staff members. This has been an important change for us because no one should be able to enter our buildings without us identifying the nature of their business. This ability which we possess is an outcome brought about in part by the threat of terrorist acts against our public schools. It impacts each of our students on a daily basis.

Besides the thousands of innocent citizens who lost their lives in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the Flight 93 crash, hundreds of firefighters, emergency responders, police officers, and military personnel were killed on September 11. One of the positive results of these incidents is an increased awareness and respect for those who serve our country in these roles. I want each of our students to understand that the good people who serve in these capacities risk their lives on a daily basis to help all of us when we face emergencies within our country and attack from outside. As a result of the September 11th attacks, our military has been involved in a ten year war to eradicate the ability of terrorism to reach us as it did on September 11. Many of our own students are currently serving in the Armed Forces of our country and some are in Afghanistan and Iraq as I write this column. It is our daily prayer that these men and women from Brown County and from every state be protected and unharmed.

Being vigilant on a daily basis for possible acts of terrorism is now a responsibility of each citizen. Our current group of students understands how security at airports currently works. It may come as a surprise to realize that most of the routine of airport security, electronic searches, checks of persons, bags, etc. have come about since September 11.

In reality we are currently involved in what is already the longest war in our history. Regardless of the debate about the validity of where we fight, it is a reality that the war on terrorism is ongoing and will continue throughout our lifetimes and perhaps much longer. That fact has implications with regard to national service and our national resolve. We currently hold to the position that terrorism cannot be allowed to dramatically alter our lifestyle. In reality it has already done this.

The legacy of September 11 is multi-faceted. It is a legacy of meeting a threat with action. Debates over the specifics of how this is to be done will continue. The lasting legacy of the September 11, 2001 attacks include a heightened sense of responsibility; an increased sense of patriotic pride and duty; and a greater awareness of all who protect us in our daily lives. These truths tell us that some good can come from the most evil of actions.