

MADEIRA BEACH HERO LOST

For Carol Coakley, September 11th is unlike any other day. It is the day her life changed forever. It is the day her son, Steven, died during the attack on the World Trade Center.

Steven lived part-time in New York and part-time in Madeira Beach. He always wanted to be a fireman. He volunteered at the Wyandanch Volunteer Fire Company at age 17. While there, he was awarded the 'Fire Fighter of the Year' award, twice. Eventually, Steven became an official firefighter with the City of New York, in the Bedford Stuyvesant Brooklyn area working with Engine 217 Firehouse.

During a visit to a fellow NY firefighter in Madeira Beach, he fell in love with our area. He eventually bought a one-story house on Bay Point Drive and began remodeling it. He worked double and triple shifts at the Firehouse, to accumulate time off, so he could fly here and work on his future home. Other NY fire fighters sometimes came with him to work with him on 'Steve's Place'.

Steven loved to fish. It probably began when as a child; his father Vinny took him fishing every weekend. He bought a used 1965 Bertram fishing boat and docked it in his Madeira Beach back yard, working on it too, whenever possible.



On a visit to Gator's Cafe, his favorite place, he met Linda New. They really hit it off and Steven began to think about getting married. On the anniversary of their first date, Steven took Linda to New York City. A friend arraigned for Steven and Linda to visit the World Trade Center at night. When they went to the very top they saw New York at night, in all its glory. It was a sight Linda will never forget.

Steve was 36, and planning to retire to Madeira Beach in five years. On September 10th 2001, Steven flew back to New York for his shift. He worked all night and was just getting off duty when the call came in for his company to go to the World Trade Center. He was on the last engine out. The buildings were already burning. People were jumping out of windows. He rushed inside the lobby. The building collapsed minutes later.

The family kept Steve's Place in Madeira Beach. They finished remodeling it, and his parents, Vinny and Carol, live there now. Inside, near the front door, is a shrine to their son. On the walls are hundreds of his photos,



medals, and plaques. Vinny wanted to build a memorial near the house. He approached Steve Kochick, a former NY firefighter who also lives in Madeira Beach.

Kochick then talked to the city commission about the project. "I had heard about Steven's death and wanted to help," says Kochick, now a city commissioner. "I met Steven a few times at different local functions. I was approached by Steven's dad about getting the city's approval. It was approved unanimously. I later spoke at the dedication in 2005. It is a shame we do not have a person like Steven Coakley in our community anymore. He was a very fine young man."

The monument located just west of their house, was dedicated by the city on September 30, 2005. On it is this message: "Swim with the gentle dolphins, Fish with the mighty pelicans, We will never forget..."



Vinny Coakley created a large display with the names and photos of each of the 343 firefighters who died in the World Trade Center. Most of the time it hangs in his home, but during the week of September 11th, he will mount the display outside Steve's Place at 880 Bay Point Dr.



Steve's sister Kara and husband Edmund Walker created *The Firefighter Steven Coakley Foundation*. They sponsor events and collect donations to help the families who lost loved ones during the September 11th World Trade Center disaster. The money is also used for scholarships, firefighting equipment, annual memorial services and donations to local charities that reflect Steven's interests. To get information about the foundation, visit their web site, www.FFStevenCoakley.org, or call 704-996-7485.

The City of Madeira Beach recently learned they will be receiving a large piece of metal recovered from the World Trade Center. It will be installed in the waterfront park on the Tom Stuart Causeway as an additional memorial to those that died September 11, 2001.