She Has Two Hands, Thousands Of Stars

By JOSEPH OROVIC

Nestled in the corner of Rego Park's Shalimar Diner, Doreen Lynn Saunders guietly worked needle and thread, her fingers instinctually dancing to the rhythm required for cross stitching.

Saunders stitched Le Moyne stars, an eight-point variety that lends itself to variation. She was working on number 2,300something of over 3,000 stars in total, varving in color from pink, red, white and gold to different shades of blues and gravs.

Working on subways, in diners or at home, her concentration and tenacity are hard to match and resemble the manic work of a subtle genius. She is driven by the same September morning burned into all our minds almost eight years ago, only it shines brighter for Saunders.

The shine will come back and be shared in time for Sept. 11's 10-year anniversary with her hopeful completion of The Americana Stars Memorial.

Consisting of one star for every victim of that day, underscored with their names and spread over 50 panels spanning more than 200 feet, Saunders is creating arguably the largest hand-made Sept. 11 memorial with other stitchers country-wide and mostly on her own dime.

"I didn't want a memorial that was about pain," she said, "I wanted something colorful and hopeful enough for children to understand but not too juvenile for adults."

But with the home stretch coming, financial realities have hit and the need for donors is very real.

"I went into this thinking I can do this project on my own, but now I realize there's

no way I could do this alone," Saunders said.

Now Saunders has garnered the support of elected officials and faceless friends, and gotten encouraging responses from major institutions like the Smithsonian.

"She has remarkable motivation." State Sen. Toby Stavisky (D-Flushing) said. "I truly feel very proud one of my constituents has taken up this project herself. People say that out of adversity comes strength and she is a perfect example of that."

Stavisky added that while she will try to find some state fiscal support for the project, the odds are slim given the current financial

In the meantime, Saunders has received pushes from supporters, family, friends, and a fan way over in Fairbury, Ill. Population: 6,000.

Leigh Little saw an article about the memorial in Stitcher's World Magazine and contacted Saunders.

"I don't think she was wanting for help. But it's stitching - it's my thing," Little said.

"Ten years is definitely not a timeline for one person to complete this. It's like building a boat in your basement."

Saunders has found in Little a kindred spirit and encouraging voice. Along with stitching, Little has taken care of the electronic end of things by coding the Memorial's Web site.

"I can't tell you enough

It's been going on for longer than Saunders wants to admit, this obsession with needlework. It started when she was 12 to be exact. From embroidery to cross stitching, the FIT grad has published three books of drawings about guilts with Dover Publications.

Saunders' Sept. 11 story is familiar. She started the day with the usual trip to work, uncertain about what was going on in Downtown Manhattan. She reached her job on 34th Street and 6th Avenue and watched in

disbelief and horror for the next several hours. She spent that night in Manhattan and the next week in tears.

Nights were lost to nightmares of herself below the towers, screams filling the air, body parts all around. Visibly shaken, she still fights back tears recounting the fall of 2001.

But all the work, empathy and hours spent will be for naught if Saunders doesn't find a space big-

ger than the small studio apartment she currently works out of. The next phase of the project requires creating the large panels and putting them together. "Getting the boat out of the basement" as Little called it.

With the help of a nonprofit arts organization called Fractured Atlas, Saunders emphasizes the project is now open to tax deductible donations. Anyone seeking to help and learn more about the project can visit The Americana Stars Memorial Web site at www.AmericanaArts.com.



