

The Cover Story

As life moves on

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The memory of the 9/11 terrorist attacks strikes a painful chord in all Americans, particularly the thousands who lost family and friends on that horrific day. Yet, some have managed to turn part of their grief into positive efforts for change.

Matt and Loreen Sellitto, both 57, of New Vernon have devoted much of the past four years to both seeking justice for the deaths and honoring the memory of their son, Matthew, 23, among the employees of Cantor Fitzgerald who perished when their New York City office building collapsed after foreign terrorists crashed a hijacked jet plane into it.

"There are a lot of organizations being run by 9/11 families," said Loreen, "but to be effective we had to focus on only a few. Otherwise we would be spread too thin."

The third annual Matthew C. Sellitto Golf Classic was planned for today at the Crystal Springs Resort in Sussex County. It is the major fund-raising tool for the Matthew C. Sellitto Foundation (MCSF), which awards \$1,000 to \$6,000 grants and scholarships to young people demonstrating the need for financial aid, as well as academic excellence, and participation in school activities and community service. This year, the golf outing has attracted about 200 enthusiasts who will spend the day golfing and dining at the resort. A fund-raising auction offers a half dozen items, the most popular of which is a trip to Ireland, which in the past has brought about \$7,000.

"After 9/11, I was in church and Gene Mulvihill, owner of Crystal Springs, was sitting next to me. When I told him we were trying to organize a golf outing to raise money for a foundation in Matthew's honor, he told me that if I could get the people, he would show me the best golf party in the state," said Matt with a smile. "We now fill two courses."

The foundation was started soon after the tragedy by Tom Giarratana of Harding, a friend of the family. While the Sellittos were still numb with shock and unable to devote much energy in the beginning, Giarratana insisted that someday the foundation would mean something to the Sellittos and pledged \$5,000 a year until it could be self-sustaining.

As the foundation grew, Loreen decided to clean out Matthew's bedroom and create an office for MCSF. Her husband was retired after teaching business law and marketing at Millburn High School for 30 years, and Loreen had taught business classes at Montville High School until 9/11. Both believed an educational foundation helping others continue their learning was a perfect way to keep Matthew's memory alive.

To date, MCSF has provided 17 young people



Sellitto family, from left, Matthew, Loreen, Matt and Jonathan in August 2001

attending institutions such as Middlebury College, Harvard University, College of New Jersey, NJIT, Rutgers University, Marist College, Seton Hall Prep (where Matthew attended high school) and The Harding School with financial aid, including one caddie scholarship in honor of Matthew's love of the sport.

Next year, MCSF plans to change the golf outing date to Sept. 11 as part of the efforts of One Day's Pay (a grass roots nonprofit organization) to make the date a national day of volunteer and charitable service. Last year, the event was held Sept. 30, Matthew's birthday.

The Sellittos, who met while attending Central Connecticut State College, grew up in entirely different worlds. The former Loreen DiGiovanni is a native of a small town in the Berkshire area of northern Connecticut, while Matt was raised in a two-family house in East Orange.

"Her parents nearly fainted when I asked them if I could marry their daughter," Matt said with a laugh. "I wanted to ask them for her hand first – the old-fashioned way – but I think they were expecting me to say something else. They thought she was crazy when we [as newlyweds] moved to my parent's house in East Orange, but that's where all the kids in my family started out until they could afford their own place."

The young couple went on to live in Chatham where both of their children, Matthew, then Jonathan, four years later, were born and ultimately settled in New Vernon on a lot Matt developed during one of his side projects. Matt, who always worked a second job in addition to teaching, still builds affordable two-family housing similar to what he knew as a child.

Shortly after the attack, the Sellittos attended a number of meetings at Pier 94 in Manhattan given by federal, state and local authorities. They said it was a surreal experience in that it felt like a trade

show with booths and interpreters.

During one of these meetings Matt heard an internationally recognized South Carolina lawyer talking about the need to go after the "bad guys" who aided and abetted the terrorists, not the "good guys." The bad guys in this case are seven international banks, eight Islamic foundations, individual terrorist financiers, the Saudi bin Laden Group, three Saudi princes, the government of Sudan, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban.

"I was taught at a young age that it was bad to steal, but it was worse to buy the stolen goods because that encouraged theft," said Matt. "It's the same with the terrorists. The people who are sending them money are even worse because they are encouraging terrorism."

The Sellittos have become advocates for the multi-trillion dollar lawsuit aimed at freezing the assets of 200 worldwide defendants who allegedly funneled cash into terrorist organizations. Ironically, according to the Sellittos, 17 foreign nations have opened their books to the group called 9/11 Families to Bankrupt Terrorism, but the United States still refuses to cooperate citing national security.

Through the lawsuit, the Sellittos came to know the 10 members of the 9/11 Commission, whom they hold in high regard, and have vowed to stay together even after the commission was disbanded to promote the recommendations they made in their report.

Part of their frustration, the Sellittos said, is they did not have the power to enforce change, but were organized only to report their findings. If the public does not demand change, chances are their recommendations never may be instituted.

"I've made several trips to Washington, D.C., this summer to attend independent forums given by some of the former members of the commission on the 42 points of change they recommended. After