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TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Monday, July 15, 2002

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Memorial project stops at Capitol

Man's journey commemorates Sept. 11

By **Rahkia Nance**
THE BRADENTON HERALD

BRADENTON — No glitz, no glamour, just a man collecting signatures while visiting every state in the nation.

Michael Joseph, a 41-year-old Fort Lauderdale artist, is creating a display of thoughts, remembrances and tributes to those directly affected by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that he hopes will hang in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

He also is collecting signatures to show support for the creation of a postage stamp featuring a striking black-and-white photograph he took nearly two years ago of the World Trade Center's twin towers with a cross from St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church nestled between them.

Joseph's campaign took him to five Florida cities last week. Today, he'll be collecting signatures for the stamp petition and remembrances for the memorial

IF YOU GO

■ Fort Lauderdale artist Michael Joseph will be collecting signatures for his stamp campaign and personal messages for his Sept. 11 tribute outside the Capitol today from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

at the Capitol. He began his journey July 4 in his hometown.

"This is a compassionate, caring effort to unite the country," he said. "We hugged a little longer after Sept. 11. Why does that have to go away?"

The idea for the project came after Joseph realized that the emotions so evident after Sept. 11 were fading. He said people have been receptive to the idea of writing messages about their experiences and emotions on panels that he hopes to combine in a manner similar to the AIDS Memorial Quilt project.

"People putting something in writing is very personal," Joseph said. "It's like a love letter to America."

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STAMP

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About 3,500 people had signed that "love letter" as of Friday afternoon, he said. Each panel is about 4 feet wide by 16 feet long. The twin towers image is printed on one of the panels. When the memorial is complete, Joseph said, it will look like a giant postcard.

He got the idea for the other part of his project — the stamp campaign — during a conversation when someone suggested that he petition to have a postage stamp designed from his photograph of the twin towers.

Joseph took a picture of the World Trade Center on Oct. 19, 2000, and titled it "In God We Trust." The photograph did not have nearly as much significance then as it does now, and he has given away copies to some of those most affected by the tragedy.

He isn't fueled by the idea of fame, he said, but just wants to spread a "message of peace and love."

Among his most ardent supporters are firefighters and police officers. Several

members of the Cedar Hammock Fire Department in Manatee County were at his stop in Bradenton last week to lend support.

Fire Commissioner Benjamin Milks said that many members of the fire department had met Joseph and were aware of his project.

He said that by signing one of the large panels, people have a way they can "put an imprint on how they feel."

Lt. Chuck Benenati said he was moved by Joseph's work. He said firefighters consider each other brothers regardless of location, so the post-Sept. 11 outpouring of grief and sympathy was automatic.

"For us to be moved is one thing," he said. "But for him to devote so much time and effort to this, that's really moving."

Joseph will continue his state-by-state trek this summer. He plans to have his mission accomplished in time for the anniversary of the terrorist attacks and wants to end the tour in New York after stops in Shanksville, Pa., and Washington, D.C., two cities also scarred by terrorism Sept. 11.