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T-R/Benjamin Duer

Jennie Waters (R) of Salem, Mass., wipes tears from her eyes while her daughter, Karen Waters of Johnstown, Pa., writes a message on a banner at the temporary memorial site for Flight 93 near Shanksville, Pa.

'We the People'

Couple crosses U.S. collecting messages of peace, hope, love

By BENJAMIN DUER

T-R Staff Writer

SHANKSVILLE, Pa. - Award-winning photographer Michael Joseph was walking through the financial district of New York City on Oct. 19, 2000, when he was inspired to capture the twin towers of the World Trade Center on film.

Deeply affected by the events of Sept. 11, Joseph and his girlfriend Page Obrig set out afterward on a journey through small towns and major cities across the United States and Canada, collecting messages of peace, hope and love on large "We the People" banners.

Joseph's black and white photograph of the twin towers, with St. Peters Church in the foreground, accompanies these banners. Last week the couple stopped in Shanksville, Pa.

They wanted to give people who were visiting the memorial site of United Airlines Flight 93 an opportunity to add their messages of hope.

"Before we leave town today we wanted to come by the memorial," Joseph told visitors. "We set up the first banner on the Fourth of July and it quickly

became filled with very touching sentiments. We were encouraged to take it all across America."

As of Sept. 4, the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., couple had visited 38 states, including California, Illinois and Ohio, and Canada. They had gathered more than 10,000 messages and signatures from ordinary citizens to members of safety forces to politicians.

Obrig said the idea for the first banner started after they noticed their community's strong sense of patriotism, which emerged shortly after the terrorist attacks, began to diminish after only six months.

"That really started to bother us," she said. "Not that you shouldn't grow and get on with your life but. ..."

The couple hope to donate the banners to a museum when their travels are completed. Joseph said the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, D.C., has expressed some interest in their work.

For more information visit Joseph's web site at www.michaeljoseph.com.