

# The Sentinel-Record

Published Daily in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, since 1877

## Freedom Prevails

by Paul Vitale

Special to The Sentinel-Record

Where do you begin? Acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001 devastated our nation, crippled our economy and left questions in the minds of many. The events that took place at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in an open field in Pennsylvania changed the way we live. All you have to do is look around.

I cannot begin to imagine what it was like for the airline passengers who fell under attack on that sunny Tuesday morning. Individuals traveling for a variety of reasons were rushing to board their flights, reading newspapers and consuming coffee, just like they had done so many times before. Meanwhile, a number of terrorists were preparing to end the lives of thousands of innocent people in the air and on the ground.

I would be lying if I said I didn't think about the thousands of victims and their families each time I've boarded a plane since that tragic day. Today is definitely no different.

As I arrived at Little Rock National Airport this morning, September 11, 2002, I couldn't help but notice the calm mood that surrounded me. The normal rush at the check-in counters

and at the gates was non-existent. Passengers arriving and departing weren't so focused on time. Yes, cell phones still rang and tighter security was evident, but the pace was slower. I'm sure this was partly due to the fewer number of travelers flying today, but I also believe it's our way to reflect on the horrific events that occurred on that solemn day last year.

Honestly, if I were not



scheduled to present a mid-morning keynote speech in St. Louis on Thursday, I would likely not be flying today. However, had that been the case, I would not have had the opportunity to meet people like the Carpenter's who were flying home to Maryland after catching two trophy fish on the White River while experiencing a wonderful vacation. I would not have witnessed the composed, yet humorous, flight attendants on Southwest Airlines. I also would not have

had the opportunity to see the American flag waving over our State Capitol during take-off. I didn't know it would affect me with such emotion.

One year later, things have indeed changed in the way we live our lives. Some for the worse, yet some for the better. In either case, I am grateful that in America, freedom prevails. We live in a country where citizens have striven to overcome the unimaginable events that took place, while uniting us through the freedom so many have fought to preserve.

It was my choice to fly today. Thousands of others made that same choice. I'm glad I did, because if I had not, I would have never observed the calmness of other passengers and airline staff. This calmness was accompanied by a sense of trust and confidence on the faces of those around me. Seeing people fly today just confirmed for me how strong our country and the people of America really are. Look around and you will no doubt see the same. ★

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