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# FIREFIGHTERS TRIBUTE

## Scenes of 9/11 horror inspired artist's work

BY CHRISTINA SANTUCCI

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Albanian-American artist Engjell Telegrafi remembered sitting in his living room on the evening of Sept. 11, 2001, watching rebroadcasts on his 32-inch TV of footage taken of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the collapse of both buildings.

"You saw the river of people coming downstairs like a river, in a panic, running for their lives, but in an orderly panic," Telegrafi recalled. "In the middle of this river, you see one, two, three helmets going upstream. Those were the firefighters, and you just knew watching it on TV that they were going up to their most certain death."

"I said I have to do something for these guys."

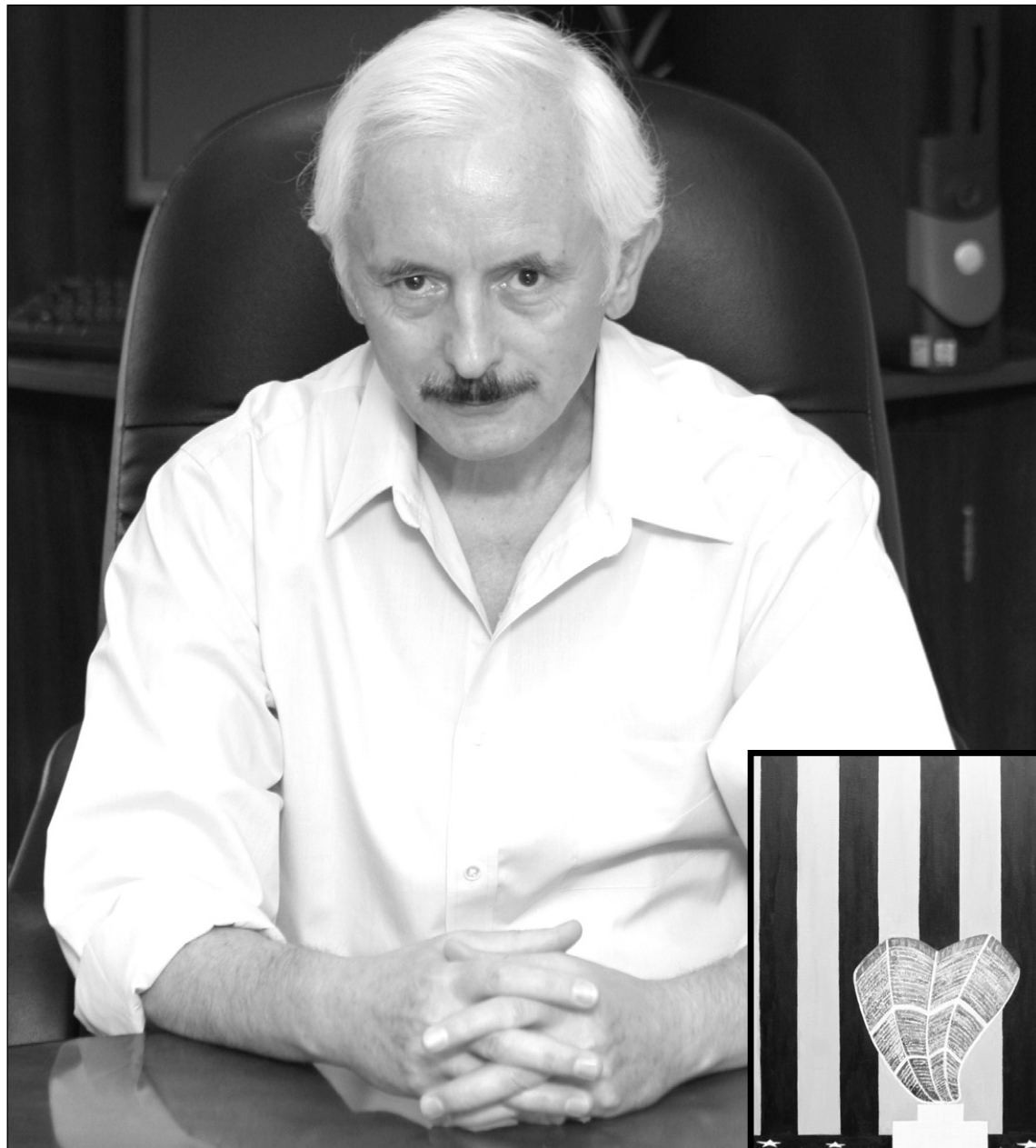
And so began a four-year artistic process that ended in July 2005 with the completion of Telegrafi's 24-inch by 22-inch acrylic painting.

The work, a somber black and white painting depicting the Twin Towers stemming from a heart and surrounded on all sides by the stars and stripes of the American flag, is meant to convey "Ground Zero" as a source of hope and inspiration.

Telegrafi said he also drew inspiration for the work from the term, Ground Zero, coined by the media to describe the site of the attacks after Sept. 11, and used heavily by former Mayor Rudy Giuliani during his emotional press conferences in days following the attacks.

"If you, rather, put the American flag as Ground Zero, you evoke hope, strength," he said, explaining that the heart and towers rest on a blanket of stars, which represent American heroes.

Telegrafi said he felt compelled



THE QUEENS COURIER/photos by Christina Santucci  
Albanian-born painter Engjell Telegrafi and his inspirational painting (inset)

to create the work as a person, an artist, and as a new American.

Born in Tirana, Albania, Telegrafi had emigrated to the United States – first to Ridgewood, Queens – in 1992 with his wife, Shpresa, and two children, Ensaid, 26, and Flonia, 23.

"If I have succeeded I have done so because [my family] pushed me to do so," he said.

While in medical school, Telegrafi worked as a political cartoonist for several newspapers, using what he described as his favorite medium: ink. However, his first artistic show-

case was in fourth grade when he drew a three-foot portrait of Albanian patriot Scanderbeg on the classroom blackboard.

"That was my first public exposure ... just 10 years old," he said.

The memory is one of few that Telegrafi will tell about his life in

Albania before coming to the United States.

"All I will say is that I felt I had to come here to promote my artistic values, to have a better opportunity to do this," he said.

Although he worked as a neuropathologist in Albania, Telegrafi could not practice medicine in the United States, so he became a lab technician at Queens Hospital Center.

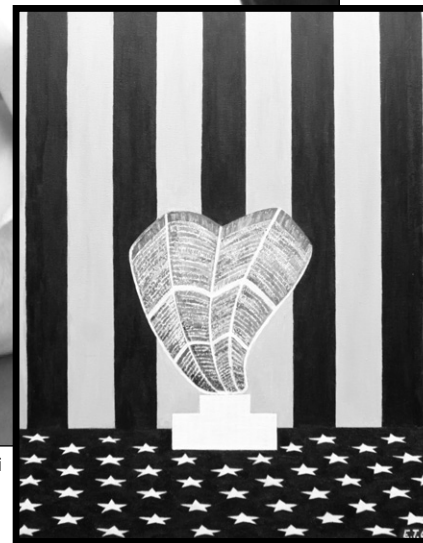
While working in the hospital in 2002, Telegrafi said that the idea to use the flag as Ground Zero struck him, and because the design concept was born in the Jamaica Estates hospital, the site will be the first to showcase the painting – blown up into a 10-foot high poster—to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the attacks. The art will be on display in the lobby of the hospital, located at 82-70 164th Street, beginning on Sept. 11, 2006.

In addition, Telegrafi has been working with State Senator Serphin Maltese to have the image made into a postage stamp. In May, Maltese invited Telegrafi to speak about his work at a Memorial Day ceremony in St. Albans.

After the event, Telegrafi said that a veteran's widow approached him and thanked him, saying, "It doesn't matter who you are; it doesn't matter where you come from. What does matter is what you have done for us, what you have done for America."

Telegrafi said that he will remember the widow for the rest of his life.

"I was unprepared; it came out of the blue," he said. "She made me feel that I had done something for her because she saw her husband in the stars of the painting."



**"If you, rather, put the American flag as Ground Zero, you evoke hope, strength."**

**Engjell Telegrafi**