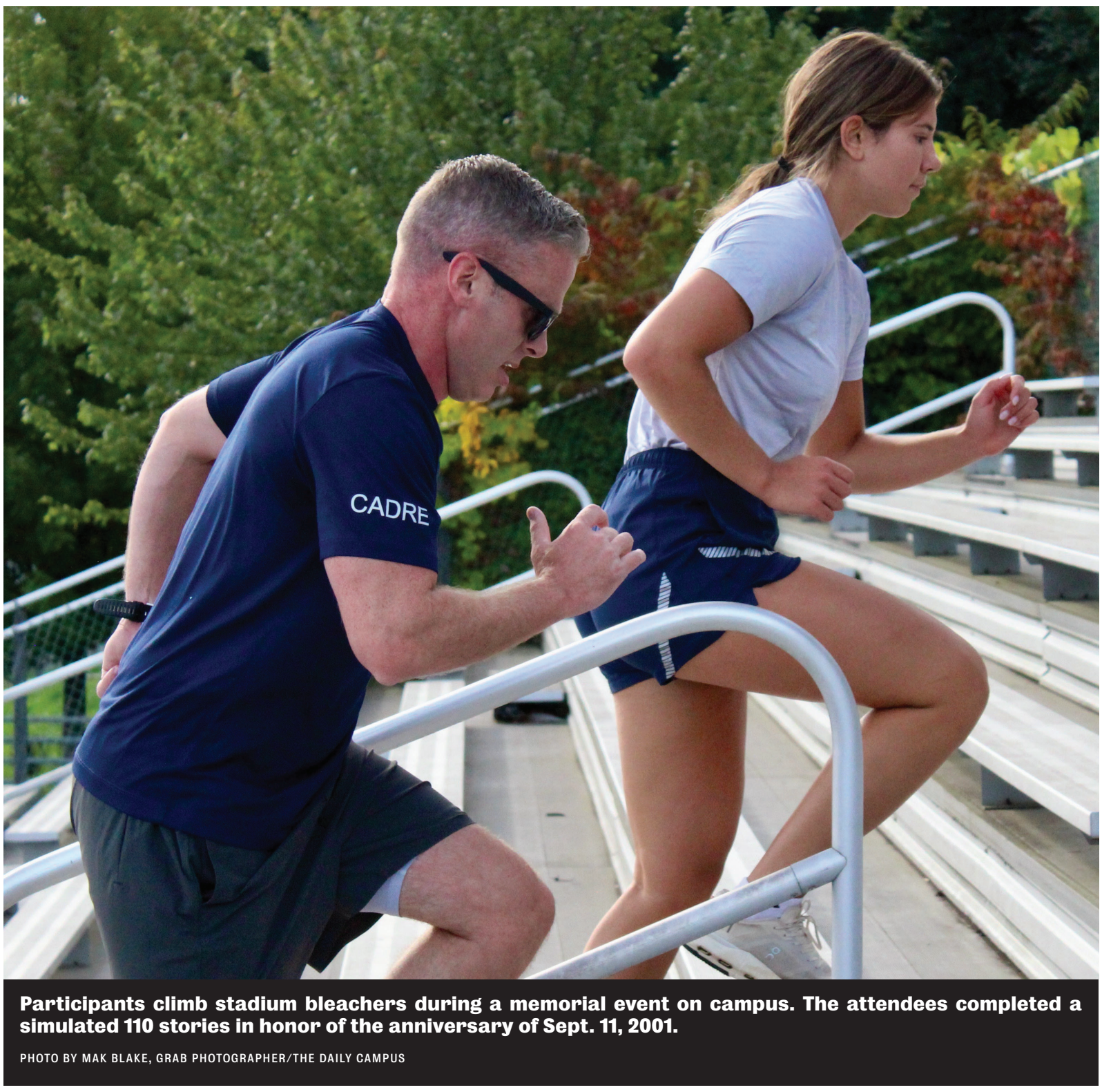
LIFE

UCONN UNITES TO HONOR 9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS



Participants climb stadium bleachers during a memorial event on campus. The attendees completed a simulated 110 stories in honor of the anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001.

PHOTO BY MAK BLAKE, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

by Thaddeus Sawyer
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
thaddeus.sawyer@uconn.edu

On the morning of the 25th Anniversary of 9/11, the sound of shoes and boots echoed out from the bleachers at the George J. Sherman Family Sports Complex.

Wearing T-shirts, weighted vests and, in one case, turnout gear, individuals raced up and down the metal bleachers. Climbing each of the three sets 10 times, every person traversed a simulated 110 stories. That mark matched the 110-story height at which the Twin Towers dominated the skyline of Lower Manhattan and the 110-story ascent first responders began on 9/11, many of them sacrificing their lives in doing so.

Joined by students and other members of the University of Connecticut community in either walking or running the steps, firefighters from the UConn Fire Department completed the climb Friday morning to honor the fallen first responders who lost their lives on 9/11.

UConn Fire Chief Chris Renshaw, who wore a weighted vest while climbing, said he thought about how climbing the steps of the World Trade Center on 9/11 was just the start of the work for the first responders on that day, as he himself completed the climb Friday morning.

"I think about, as uncomfortable as I am on a beautiful, sunny day wearing shorts and a T-shirt, that my brothers and sisters that passed away at the World Trade Center that day as members of FDNY were in full gear, carrying equipment doing the same climb one step at a time, knowing full well that they weren't coming back and that they needed to do their job, first and foremost, and try to make the outcome for someone else's life worth it," Renshaw said. "As uncomfortable as I may feel right now, it is nowhere near what the level of discomfort had to have been in those moments before the towers fell."

The event was held by the UConn Office of Veterans and Military Programs. Director of Veterans and Military Programs Alyssa Kelleher said the event was also held on the 20th anniversary of the attacks in 2021.

The climb began promptly at 8:50 a.m., matching the time that first responders initially entered the North Tower.

A university-wide remembrance ceremony was held inside the UConn Student Union at noon.

Renshaw, who also gave a speech prior to the climb next to a wreath adorned with red, white and blue flowers, said that the event was an important way to make sure that even those born after 9/11 remember the events of that day.

"Every generation has its moments where there is a turning point," Renshaw said. "For the Greatest Generation, it was Pearl Harbor. For my generation, it's Sept. 11. For your generation, I hope it's nothing that ever reaches the levels of both of those in the past.

But, if we don't remember the moments, then we lose them forever and the choices and the conditions that occurred that allowed that to happen could be repeated. Sharing days like today is important for us to remember that we can come together as a community, but also because we can never forget in order to make sure that we do the best that we can to prevent such things happening again."

Among the students participating in the climb were members of the UConn Air Force ROTC. Seventh-semester mechanical engineering student Will Hennessey, a member of the UConn Air Force ROTC and one of the first participants to finish the climb, said that it was important to be there to support and learn from the members of the UConn community who were alive and serving on 9/11.

"What's going through my mind is the suffering I have today [is] nothing compared to what everyone else has went through," Hennessey said. "I have the opportunity to wake up every day, to suffer, to put my body through physical strain because of the sacrifices people made. It's amazing that we get the opportunity to do that every day."



UConn firefighter walks up stadium stairs in full protective gear and equipment. The turnout for the commemorative stair climb included students and other members of the UConn community. PHOTO BY MAK BLAKE, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS