

His 9/11 birthday honors firefighters

By Joyesha Chesnick
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Today is Frank Sartanowicz's birthday.

At 81, the retired fighter pilot should be feted and recognized for his life's achievements.

Instead, on this day of remembering the heroes and victims of 9/11, Sartanowicz is the one doing the honoring.

"I decided to celebrate my birthday by honoring firefighters, our local firefighters who do so much for us," he said from his Green Valley home.

Sartanowicz came up with the idea of cooking, serving and sharing a dinner with the men and women who help keep Green Valley safe.

"I thought we could bond with them and have the pleasure of meeting with them," he said.

It's a nice idea, said Gretchen Chua, who turns 22 today. But she's doing her birthday a little differently.

"My take on this, every September 11, is I don't think what happened should hinder you from celebrating your birthday," she said. "The whole point of the terrorists is they want to scare you, and you shouldn't give in to it. That doesn't mean when you're celebrating you're not remembering."

Chua, who will graduate from the University of Arizona this spring with a degree in engineering, said it has never crossed her mind to tone down



Mamta Popat / Arizona Daily Star

Frank Sartanowicz picks up four turkeys at Bashas'. He's coordinating dinners to serve at five fire stations on the anniversary of 9/11.

her birthday celebrations — usually dinner out with friends.

Last night, she and 10 others went out for noodles, a symbol of long life in her native Philippines. And tonight she is going to the theater.

The only time 9/11 has been anything other than a normal birthday was three years ago, on the day of the attacks, she said.

"My mom called me (from the Philippines) in the morning and woke me up," she said. "Instead of greeting me happy birthday, I guess she forgot, and she told me, 'Come home! Come home!'"

Chua said her mother was afraid that the Los Angeles air-

port, where most flights departing for the Philippines originate, might come under attack and be closed down.

Since then, Chua said, she has taken a more global view, remaining cognizant of the terrorist acts taking place all over the world. But "I think it shouldn't hinder you from going on with your life."

Sartanowicz is focusing his energy locally and hoping others will do the same.

What started for him a week ago as a simple mission at a single fire station has blossomed into a much larger operation encompassing a cadre of volunteers, a civic organization and

five fire stations.

And Sartanowicz, who moved to Green Valley four years ago, hopes the idea will spread to Tucson and beyond in the years to come.

Tonight, he and his wife, Betty Jane, will be taking a smoked turkey with all the traditional trimmings over to Station 153 of the Green Valley Fire District.

When he came up with the idea a week ago, Sartanowicz thought that would be enough. Then "someone reminded me we have two other fire stations," he said.

He went to the Green Valley Elks Lodge, of which he is a member, with his problem.

"They thought it was a great idea. They said, 'Fine, we'll cook two dinners for the other stations,' and we got people to deliver and serve them," he said.

"Then someone reminded me that we have two rural stations in Sahuarita that also serve Green Valley."

Two couples from the local bridge club stepped up for the task.

"The effort is appreciated.

"I think it's great to get the community support to recognize what we do," said Simon Davis, fire chief at Station 153. "It doesn't take away what happened three years ago, but we do appreciate it."

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