

# The Gazette

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## Local company honors firefighter

Award-winning documentary tells family's Sept. 11 story

by Katherine Heerbrandt

Staff Writer

He was the baby in his family, orphaned by age 10 and raised by his six older brothers and sisters. A firefighter in New York City, Stephen Siller died a hero's death on Sept. 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center.

Siller's life is commemorated in an award-winning documentary, "For The Love of Their Brother," produced by 3 Roads Communications in Frederick.

Siller was a father, husband, friend, cousin and brother. Above all, he was a firefighter, part of an elite rescue squad out of Brooklyn.

That day, Siller, having completed his shift, was on his way to play a round of golf when he heard the news of the attack. He turned his truck around and headed back into Manhattan. Finding the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel blocked, Siller donned his 75-pound gear and ran along the 1.7-mile tunnel's catwalk before being picked up by a rescue vehicle and taken to the South Tower to find his unit. The 34-year-old Siller's life ended that day, but thanks to his family, his story lives on.

In the face of their loss and reeling with grief, Siller's family wanted to carry on his legacy of generosity and courage. The close-knit family rallied to put together an annual race that retraces Siller's run through the Brooklyn-Battery tunnel, and dubbed it the Tunnel to Towers Race.

Now in its fourth year, the event has raised more than \$1 million for various charities. The money has funded a new wing of the New York Foundling Home, the New York Burn Center, Fallen Hero's Foundation and the Freedom Alliance Scholarship Fund to benefit families affected by the 9/11 attacks.

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Tom Fedor/The Gazette

Some of the 3 Roads Communications staff who helped produce the award-winning documentary "For the Love of Their Brother," posed at their Frederick studio Wednesday morning. They are (from left) Russ Hodge, Hilary Burke, Mike Yamrus, James McGillin and Molly Boyle. Hodge is a cousin of the firefighter profiled in the documentary.

# SILLER

Continued from A-1

The Stephen Siller FDNY "Let Us Do Good" Children's Foundation helps distribute the money.

This average, middle-class Staten Island family could not imagine the outpouring of support or the success of their efforts when they pondered how best to honor their brother.

"For the Love of Their Brother" was special in more ways than one for Russ Hodge, president of 3 Roads Communications.

The Sillers are Hodge's cousins, though he said he was not particularly close with his extended family — he was the 29th of 30 cousins, and Stephen Siller was the youngest.

But the experience of writing and producing the documentary sparked a more enduring relationship with his cousins.

And, for those at 3 Roads who worked on the project, their involvement was more than just another day at the office.

"This is my boss' family, but really they became our own family as well," said Jeremy Eccard, editor and producer. "They are the most loving and caring people I ever met. ...It was something you just wanted to be a part of."

Eccard took more than 33 hours of footage and honed it to a 30-minute production.

The result is a celebration of Siller's life, focusing on his relationship with his siblings and the Tunnel to Towers Race.

The race has grown each year, pulling in celebrities such as John Turturro, who narrates the documentary, and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani.

"[The Sillers] are still completely overwhelmed and still completely grateful," Hodge said.

He recalled the day the Siller brothers and sisters gathered in his studio at the Glass Factory on Fourth Street just a few weeks before Christmas.

Though he had heard the story, produced public service announcements for the event and worked as master of ceremonies at the race for two years, he was inspired anew by the Sillers' resilience and love.

"They come through just as they are — such decent people in such pain.

"It was still so emotionally raw for them. They loved him so much," Hodge said. "But they refused to give in to the negative side of this, they were just determined to use it for good."

The four-hour shoot had 3



Photo courtesy 3 Roads Communications

**Russ Hodge, president of 3 Roads Communications and a cousin to the family, watches as the Sillers recount their heroic brother's life, following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City.**

Roads staff sniffing and sobbing and needing a break.

Though the story is of one family's loss, Siller's oldest brother, Russell, calls it a New York story and Hodge agrees. Despite their reputation for being rude, Hodge believes that New Yorkers "have the biggest hearts in the world."

Giving back to your community is a highly prized value where Hodge grew up, he said.

The race, which closes down a chunk of lower Manhattan for several hours the last Sunday of September each year, is testament to the hearts of New Yorkers, Hodge said. Everyone was willing to help, from the bureaucrats to the teamsters.

"The teamsters said, 'You need electricity, you got electricity.' Because deep down, they know what is right and they know the right thing to do," he said.

Narrator Turturro lives near the firehouse where Siller was stationed. Each year he attends the race, reads a poem and lends support.

In an interview with American Public Television, which will air the program across the country, Turturro said The Sillers "have really made it their business to not have their brother forgotten. It's very admirable, courageous and painful for them."

The three international and four national awards Hodge's company has received for the doc-

## On TV

### "For the Love of Their Brother"

will air on 250 American Public Television stations across the country, including an 11 p.m. showing Aug. 22 on the Washington station, WHUT. It will also air on Armed Forces Television and the Sundance Channel.

For more information, visit [www.fortheloveoftheirbrother.com](http://www.fortheloveoftheirbrother.com) or [www.tunneltowers.org](http://www.tunneltowers.org).

umentary validates the choice to do the story the way he and his staff did it, as well as the skills and talents they brought to the project, he said.

That includes the original music, scored by Blue Noise Studio, also located in the Glass Factory.

Local composer Paul Rose wrote the music as he watched a rough-cut of the documentary, said Eric Delente of Blue Noise.

The biggest challenge in writing the script, according to Hodge, was staying out of the way of the story.

"I wanted to do it justice. ... It is so beautiful and uplifting and insightful," he said.

After the footage was shot, the hardest part for Hodge became deciding what to leave out. He wanted to include the story one of Sillers' sisters told about the tunnel being a metaphor for their experience in losing their beloved brother.

As Hodge recounted the story, his 9-year-old son, Patrick, summed it up: "No matter how dark it is, you always find light."

## "Elvis N An Enterta

You won't want to miss this li evening of Elvis hits performe will be delectable tropical dri desserts including parfaits, ke and fruit salad.

Space is limited at this FREE seat for you and a friend today

Sunrise Assisted Living is comm knowledge of senior living topics seminars designed to help and in