

# The Scarsdale Inquirer

Founded in 1901

VOLUME 100, NUMBER 36

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

## Drozdov proud to help MTA rebuild after attacks

By TODD SLISS

The first time Mark Drozdov went to Ground Zero a day or two after Sept. 11, 2001, he couldn't believe the scene. He was so overwhelmed that he couldn't remember where he parked, and when he finally found his minivan he realized he had locked his keys inside.

"When my mind went blank [and] I couldn't remember where we parked, it was an indication what the reaction was," Drozdov said. "My mind was totally in shambles."

Drozdov finally happened upon an open firehouse and a young, pale-looking fireman who was able to jimmy his car door open. Upon striking up a conversation, Drozdov learned the firefighter was the only one from his house who had survived the terrorist attack. It was one of the many constant reminders of the tragedy that had just occurred, but also the selflessness as the firefighter didn't hesitate to help.

Drozdov is an environmental health and safety engineer who focuses on "industrial hygiene and exposure in the workplace" for both private and public entities.

Just like all the brave first responders, when Drozdov and his wife, Victoria, were called down to serve their clients at Ground Zero, they did not hesitate.

"It's a horror site with buildings destroyed, smoke in the air, dust everywhere," Drozdov said. "That smell, I don't think I'll ever forget the smell. You can't believe that is what you're seeing. Total disbelief, total shock. And that's why I think we ended up working so hard and working together because I think everybody was in that state of shock that we wanted to contribute any which way we could. There was a lot of camaraderie in the field."

In 1992, the Drozdovs, who were Edgemont residents from 1999 until a few weeks ago when they moved to the city, had co-founded Creative Environmental Solutions (CES), which was acquired by British Standards Institution in 2016, and had many clients in and around the World Trade Center, including the MTA. They were initially called in to work with a client at 1 Liberty Plaza and, before long, the MTA called CES to help with the cleanout and restoration of the 1 and 9 subway lines that were buried in the rubble.

"We were providing services in the field for the MTA and when 9/11 happened and when their infrastructure got destroyed down at Ground Zero, we were one of the first firms to be called in to respond," Drozdov said.

Part of the initial response was to fit the MTA engineers and other workers and overseers with proper respirators and personal protective equipment before they could go in to assess the situation.

"The tunnels underneath World Trade Center were destroyed and collapsed," Drozdov said. "Cortland Station, Rector Street Station, all were affected. We worked day and night, sometimes 24/7. It was very stressful. Everybody kind of pulled together and we were there, all the time for years, restoring the system."



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Mark Drozdov at Ground Zero.

Just one year after the attack, three of four stations in the area reopened, with the exception of Cortland Street Station, which was being bypassed by the 1 and 9 trains. The initial restoration came in ahead of time and under budget. The Cortland Street Station did not reopen until 17 years later in 2018.

"I was very proud to be part of the solution, part of the restoration," Drozdov said. "I'm honored we were able to do this. I was the only civilian to receive a special commemorative pin. All the other recipients were MTA employees [who] were involved in the restoration. I was very proud of the acknowledgement of the work that me and my team had put in."

For the MTA over the years, CES worked on infrastructure improvement projects at stations and train yards to identify environmental hazards that fall under the PALMS acronym — PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), asbestos, lead, mold and silica — which are common "contaminants of concern," and how to best and safely address them with "safe and effective abatement remediation."

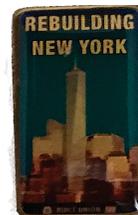
While Drozdov was more likely to oversee projects in the field, Victoria was the technological whiz.

"She brought in the technology aspect to the environmental health and safety industry that very few other companies had," Drozdov said. "One of the first contracts we had was with the MTA and we were the only company of our nature that did everything on the computer. We had laptops in the field and the data was recorded electronically. It was pretty innovative and very impressive. We were the pioneers in that respect."

On the morning of 9/11, Drozdov was on his way to Queens to meet his brother on



Mark Drozdov spent time at Ground Zero as he helped lead the rebuilding of MTA subway stations for the 1 and 9 trains.



an MTA job to assess a lead paint hazard. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, traffic just stopped on the other side of the river as the smoke started rising in the skyline. "Nobody could figure out what it was," Drozdov said. "We could just see the smoke coming out. The traffic just stopped and everybody was in horror and shock."

Drozdov called his office, which was at 1 Penn Plaza on the 32nd floor, where his staff had a prime view of the World Trade Center. The office was eventually evacuated.

The fact that 20 years have passed is not lost on Drozdov, who just this week drove with his mother past the Freedom Tower, a constant reminder. With a Sept. 9 birthday and having been so connected to the rebuild, Drozdov will head back to the site this weekend, truly never forgetting.

"With the nature of my business I'm called in to respond to fires, floods, all kinds of disasters for the restoration purposes and the response," Drozdov said. "Even with Hurricane Sandy you can't do anything until the hazardous materials are identified and removed out of the way of the plumbers and electricians. We're the first ones in always. That's the nature of the environmental health and safety business that I'm in."

"Seeing the homes after Hurricane Sandy sort of reminded me of 9/11. It was that devastation we saw. Everybody is trying to do something, but they're lost. It's an enormous devastation. At times you feel powerless and hopeless, but no matter how bad it is, we'll get it restored. We'll get it back even better than it was before."