Somber ceremonies held to commemorate terrorist attacks, honor fallen victims

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LAS CRUCES » The recollections of Las Crucens were still vivid Wednesday, as the nation marked the 12th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorists attacks of New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C.

“It still makes me mad, and sad,” said Raymond Pacheco, 78, who attended a ceremony at Munson Senior Center that commemorated the attacks.

“I’m old enough to remember Pearl Harbor, the day (President John F.) Kennedy died, and 9/11. To me, Kennedy dying was the worst, but 9/11 isn’t too far behind.

“That day changed the world for a lot of us.”

Ceremonies at New Mexico State University, Mayfield and Las Cruces high schools, Munson Senior Center, Highland Elementary School, and at Al...
bert Johnson Park all were staged Wednesday to remind people of all ages how much of an impact the 9/11 terrorists attacks had on the U.S. and Las Cruces. Earlier in the day, New Mexico State University Army ROTC members fired a cannon four times — each at the exact moment in the day when the planes either struck their targets or crashed.

The underlying theme of all the ceremonies was the same: We will never forget 9/11.

“I was 5 that day,” said Army Junior ROTC Cadet Capt. John Salinas, a Las Cruces High School student. “I was in a preschool class at Tombaugh (Elementary) School when my father showed up. He said, ‘We’re going to war,’ because of those attacks. That had an affect on me, and it wound up taking a toll on my family. Within a couple of days of that, my aunt joined the Marine Corps.’

As a 5-year-old, Salinas recalled how for days after the terrorist attacks he played with Legos building blocks and kept building and re-building the Twin Towers. Even as a kindergarten student, the attacks affected him.

“It was a very touching day for me,” he said. “I felt the emotion.”

At NMSU, students and ROTC cadets gathered and talked about the people who perished in the destruction of the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers. At Johnson Park, Mayor Ken Miya-gishima recalled the Sept. 11 terrorists attacks during a candlelight vigil. Again, the theme of never forgetting the horrific events that took place that fateful day was affirmed.

At many of those ceremonies, a moment of silence, in tribute to those who died, was conducted. The gray skies Las Cruces was under Wednesday mirrored many of the feelings felt by those who attended ceremonies.

“This wasn’t just a Junior ROTC ceremony, it’s a Las Cruces observance,” said Army Sgt. Maj. Velton Locklear, commander of the JROTC program at Las Cruces High. “You could almost hear a pin drop in this gymnasium as the ceremony was conducted, and that’s great. Many of the students are probably too young to remember very much about what happened that day. But they should ask their teachers, they remember, just like a lot of other folks do.”

“Twelve years ago (Wednesday) was a very busy day...That was a very horrible day. We’re making that connection now, and that’s very, very important today.”

Salinas, now 16, put the meaning of 9/11 into perspective.

“Freedom never dies,” he said.

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REMEMBERING 9/11

Twelve years ago: On Sept. 11, 2001 terrorists hijacked commercial airliners that were crashed into the two towers of the World Trade Center, in New York City; at the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C., and into a Pennsylvania farm field before the third plane could destroy a major target.

In and near Las Cruces: Military installations at White Sands Missile Range, White Sands Test Facility, Holloman Air Force Base, near Alamogordo, and Fort Bliss, in El Paso, were all closed to the public and were heavily guarded for days. Numerous public events were canceled that day and in the days that followed, and there was a brief rush among people buying gas and groceries.

Since then: Special events to commemorate the terrorists attacks, and those killed, have been conducted every year on Sept. 11.