

Reporter's property site of Sept. 11 crash



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For The Capital Times

HARRISBURG, Pa.—Tim Lambert, an established reporter, has become a very important source over the last six months to many media institutions. Lambert is one of the property owners of the site that Flight 93 crashed on during the terrorist attacks of September 11. The plane crashed in Stony Creek Township of Somerset County, Pennsylvania. When one looks at pictures of the Flight 93 crash and the crater that it made, Lambert's tree line is in the distance, approximately 10 yards from the crater. He is a trusted and important source to those reporting on this tragic event. He has been dealing with people who want to know what is going on at the site as far as clean-up and what is being done to create a possible memorial.

Lambert was born in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, which is near Pittsburgh. He graduated from IUP with a B.S. in Communications Media and a minor in political science. His first job was in Lewistown as a country music DJ. His second job was located in Gettysburg and he worked part-time as a news anchor and reporter for a local radio station. At the same time, he was a sports reporter and columnist for the Gettysburg Times. He later accepted a full-time position at the radio station and stopped working at the paper. After about a year, he left the radio station due to budget cuts. However, during his time at the radio station he was recognized several times for journalism excellence by the Associated Press. His next job was then at WITF news radio in Harrisburg as a part-time afternoon host and reporter. The September 11 attacks occurred only three weeks into his job at WITF. This enabled him to prove himself to the rest of the staff, which then made him a major source to various media institutions in the region.

Tim Lambert has been a source for various mediums such as radio, television and newspaper. He has been interviewed mostly for hard news stories since they usually involve the crash, but he has also been interviewed for feature stories as well. He was interviewed for several newspapers in the area such as: the Gettysburg Times, the York Dispatch, the Philadelphia Daily News, the Harrisburg Patriot News, and the Hanover Evening Sun. Television stations, WHP Channel 21 and WGAL Channel 8 asked for interviews and comments as well. The only radio station that has contacted Lambert is Radio PA. Since October, his press contact is intermittent, usually every two to four weeks someone needs commentary on the situation or an update on the crash site.

Although being a source for the Flight 93 crash has been his most important role as an interviewee, he has been a source for newspapers in the past. The Gettysburg Times and the Beaver County Times compiled a section on Alzheimer's disease and how it affects family members. Lambert's mother has the disease and he was asked to contribute to the story from personal experience about home care and how it has affected him and his family. Although, he does not mind being interviewed, he prefers to conduct interviews in person. However, most of his interviews occur over the phone. The reason that he likes to be interviewed in person is because the phone can be disconnecting, meaning the points may not be as clear as if the interview was in person. He says person to person interviews allow him to explain, give gestures and show emotions, which help make the information more credible.

Lambert said he has managed to build strong relationships with some of the reporters who have interviewed him in the past. Trust is very important in these types of situations, not only for the source, but for the reporter as well. He likes to contact the press to update them on what is happening in Somerset regarding the crash site to give information they may not have heard yet or do not have access to. He feels that as a source he has been treated fairly and the information that he has given has been written accurately. Although Lambert has not had any bad experiences with interviewers, he thinks that the newspapers tend to be better at explaining his story and getting the main points across to the readers. However, with the same respect, the newspapers also tend to be the medium that writes quotes that are not exactly what was said. He said they tend to capture the spirit of what was said, but not the exact dialogue.

Not only is it frustrating to Tim Lambert when reporters do not quote him directly, but he feels as though some media outlets have ignored his role or assistance concerning the Flight 93 crash. One example of this occurred about 10 days after the crash, when the Patriot News failed to even mention the property owners and their role in the event. He feels as though the property owners have been overlooked and the press has downplayed his role. Lambert thinks that he should be called on to contribute information on what is going to happen or what should happen to the land. However, for the most part he has had good experiences with the media and is more than willing to comment as a source.

Tim believes that the best interviews have been those that the reporter has asked thorough questions. He also appreciates it the interviewer asks for clarification rather than letting it go. He thinks it is important for the reporter to be sensitive in their questioning and respectful to the source. He said that if you treat a source as a person, the building of trust in the relationship begins between the two people, which is essential for good interviewing. He also said that if you treat a source as a source they will only act as a source. This means that the interview will be less beneficial than it could have been if a different approach was used. Lambert said that it is important to be an objective reporter and always get both sides of a story. The best advice that Tim Lambert can give to young reporters is, "trust who you are talking to and it is absolutely necessary to have a 'bullshit radar' to funnel information to discern what is news and what is just spin—everyone has an agenda."

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