

Township of Verona

September 11 Remembrance Ceremony

Wednesday, September 11, 2024

8:45am

Welcome

[At this moment] At 8:46 on the bright, beautiful morning of September 11, 2001, as people went to work in lower Manhattan, American Airlines flight 11 crashed into floors 93 through 99 of 1 World Trade Center, the north tower of the complex. Police, fire, and EMS personnel responded to what most believed to be an aircraft accident. At 9:03, United Airlines Flight 175 struck floors 77 through 85 of the South Tower. Government leaders and responders quickly realized that this was not an accident -- the United States had been the victim of a coordinated terrorist attack. As response efforts in New York intensified and airspace was closed over the city, American Airlines Flight 77 hit the E ring of the Pentagon at 9:37. Four minutes after the South tower collapsed at 9:59am, Flight 93 was brought to the ground in Pennsylvania by passengers who stormed the cockpit in defiance of the hijackers. The blue skies of Manhattan became filled with dust, smoke, and debris while Americans evacuated the World Trade center and government buildings throughout Washington, D.C. As rescuers intensified their responses, the South Tower, North Tower, E Ring, and 7 World Trade Center collapsed, changing America forever.

We gather today to remember the tragedies of September 11, honor the extraordinary heroism of countless people, support the survivors of the attacks, and reflect on the lasting impact of the day's events on the United States and us as individuals.

I am Mayor Chris Tamburro. On behalf of the Township of Verona, and the Township Council, including Deputy Mayor Jack McEvoy, Councilman Alex Roman, Councilwoman Christine McGrath, and Councilwoman Cynthia Holland. I welcome all to our 23rd annual September 11 remembrance ceremony.

Prayer

Would Father Peter Wehrle of Our Lady of the Lake Church please come to the lectern to offer the invocation?

National Anthem

The Verona High School Chamber Choir, under the direction of Mr. Christopher Fludd will now perform the national anthem.

Mayor's Remembrance

Beginning in elementary school, youth in the United States learn of the American heroes who molded our country into the great republic it remains today. We can all recount stories of extraordinary people like George Washington, Mary Ludwig Hays (Molly Pitcher), Patrick Henry, Susan B. Anthony, The Rev. Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Clara Barton, George Patton, Rosa Parks, and Neil Armstrong. While the heroes on this list earned that distinction in a variety of ways, one commonality exists among all of them. Before they were extraordinary, they were ordinary. Before a combination of circumstances, experience, inspiration, and decisions made them awe-inspiring figures, they lived relatively normal lives like their contemporaries. They attended school, kept jobs, were sons or daughters, mothers or fathers. They were members of their communities.

Despite being as human as their peers, none of these figures became a hero by accident. On one day or over a series of events, each made deliberate decisions to transcend normalcy, to act and sacrifice in the name of the greater good, to appreciate something larger than oneself.

Before dawn on September 11, 2001, there were countless heroes waiting to be born in and around lower Manhattan, the Pentagon, and Newark Airport, the port of departure for United Airlines flight 93.

Hundreds of police officers, firefighters, emergency medical services providers, building staff, and military personnel rushed toward mortal danger after the violent attacks. Many did not live to tell their stories. Historians continue to gather first-hand accounts from recordings of emergency radio traffic, video, artifacts, photographs, and survivor reflections to honor the heroism of those we lost. These stories show how the lives of emergency personnel and office-workers-turned-rescuers unexpectedly intersected with others in moments of extraordinary

humanity. These lessons teach us that the decisions that many made in the moment had unpredictable and existential consequences.

When the members of the FDNY Ladder 6 crew left their station in Chinatown on the morning of September 11, all they knew from radio reports was that “a plane just hit the World Trade Center.” On their arrival, it was clear that this was not a small plane, but a rather airliner whose impact with the North tower created unprecedented destruction. The second aircraft was approaching the South tower as they entered its twin. With the crash on the 93-99th floors, the six-man team would face significant challenges to ascend the more than one thousand stairs to reach this area. As they climbed upwards wearing over a hundred pounds of gear, crowds of people were moving in the opposite direction – toward safety. The crew kept rising the stairs, against the strong current of evacuees. During their journey upward, the firefighters felt a remarkable rumbling – the collapse of the South Tower. Realizing that the North would most likely have the same fate, they made the difficult decision to work their way down. During their much more rapid descent, they encountered Josephine Harris, a port authority employee, who was struggling to get down the stairs after having evacuated the 73rd floor.

In that moment, each Ladder 6 firefighter was aware that the team’s departure from the unstable building would be dangerously delayed by helping Ms. Harris down the stairs. They were equally as convinced, however, that the right thing to do was to help her. They became an inseparable team of seven in the race

for their lives. When they reached the fourth floor, Josephine was unable to walk any further. Just as they attempted to regroup, the North Tower collapsed.

Fire Captain John Jonas later recalled that “Everything start[ed] heaving. Unbelievable noise. Everything flying around. Tremendous dust clouds. I’m thinking “I can’t believe this is how it ends for me.”” Miraculously, however, this moment instead became the middle of their story. After the debris settled in place, they found themselves alive but surrounded by the remains of the building, unable to exit. Fighting the desperation of being effectively buried alive, they sought ways to safety. The stairways were inaccessible or destroyed. Eventually, they pried open what had been the second floor of the building, two dozen feet below their position at the time of collapse. They found a small segment of surviving stairway that would get them lower and closer to safety. Josephine was in bad shape, but the firefighters refused to leave her behind, securing her in a harness to aid in their further descent. They went down as low as they could and waited for help, which came as the air cleared and radio transmissions summoned FDNY rescuers.

All seven of that impromptu family survived the ordeal. This miracle was the result of the unpredictable intersection of the lives of Josephine and Ladder 6. Without the firemen, Josephine would never have made it as the stairway was severed at the fifth floor. But for Josephine, the Ladder 6 firemen would have traveled at a much quicker pace and made it to the lobby, only to be crushed by the weight of the building when it fell. Dubbed after the rescue as the Lucky Six, the firefighters named Josephine their “guardian angel.”

This is just one of thousands of stories of ordinary people becoming heroes, illustrating well the consequences of making conscious decisions to stop and act. But the story also poses two enduring questions. How do we honor the heroes of 9/11 both living and deceased? How can we live up to the example they set for us?

The firefighters of Ladder 6 stopped to be heroes for one person in front of them in need. They could have moved faster to save themselves or went further into the building to attempt a more complex rescue. But they all realized that at that time, in that place, they needed to be there for Josephine.

Like thousands of stories from that fateful day, this one offers us poignant lessons that can guide our lives. The first is that sometimes the most needing of our help are those in proximity to us, in or near our paths - individuals and groups that we could easily pass by if we are not paying attention. The more observant we try to be, the more present we are for others, and the more generous with time and spirit we are, the more likely that we can have a profound impact on the people's lives. Sometimes, we may not know the impact of kind words, advocacy, effort, and sacrifice. However, those in need of a hero will never forget that another stopped to be theirs. We are all better served if we deliberately pause from busy lives and careful plans to take time to consider those in need around us. Slow down. Even the simplest actions, consideration, and empathy can have substantial impacts on the trajectory of the life of another. Meet people where they are. Stopping for Josephine and adjusting to her pace, despite the potential for mortal danger, saved the lives of

seven people that day whose fates were suddenly and profoundly intertwined. Any one of us can potentially change a life, even if we never know that we did.

The second lesson is that people who may cross our paths unexpectedly may be and bear extraordinary gifts. As our lives progress, we can become comfortable with our circle of friends and family, and may be less likely to make room for others. Our lives routinely intersect with new people who bear wisdom, talents, skills, kindness, and love. We must simply give them the opportunity to share those gifts. When we purposefully stop to open our hearts to others, we improve two lives. The crew of Ladder 6 still regard Josephine as their guardian angel, while they will always be her heroes. We should be as open to receiving others as we are to serving them.

There is a line from the Babylonian Talmud that struck me the first time I heard it and which has had increasing meaning for me. “Anyone who saves one life, it’s as if they’ve saved the entire world.” When we stop to serve others, our actions create ripple effects. The individual whose life we influence may go on to do the same for several more people, resulting in exponential impact. As an EMT for 22 years, I have seen patients who receive skilled emergency treatment survive potentially fatal injuries and illnesses. Many move forward with profound optimism and senses of purpose, dedicating their lives to improving those of others. Though it may not be CPR or bleeding control that saves a life, but kind words, consideration, and friendship. We are all capable of living up to the challenge of the Talmud. We honor the heroes of 9/11 and those we lost by slowing down to take notice of those

around us who need our help, allowing our lives to intersect with others in service of the greater good. Like the extraordinary people who changed the course of history, there is a hero – someone's hero - waiting to be born in all of us.

We act in honor of Verona residents Billy Erwin and Stephen Roach who died that fateful morning that changed the world forever. We honor and celebrate their lives, their loving commitment to their families, and the legacy that they have left for their survivors.

We act in the memory of University Hospital Paramedic and Verona Rescue Squad Member Ryan McCormack who died in 2008 from Hodgkin's Disease as a result of his work at Ground Zero.

We act for of all of the police officers, firefighters, EMS personnel, members of the armed forces, and the thousands of Americans whom we lost or whom suffered lasting effects of the attacks. We mourn all who died on that fateful day and in the last 23 years from September 11 related illnesses. We must continue to uplift those who still suffer. I ask all present to be there with purpose for those in our local, regional, and national communities who need our enduring support.

Lastly, we act to honor the countless stories of heroism on 9-11 that remain untold due to the untimely deaths of so many heroes.

We will never forget.

I invite lifelong Verona resident, Deputy Mayor Jack McEvoy, to share his memories and reflections of our town on September 11, 2001.

Lighting of the Candles

[Deputy Mayor McEvoy]

Moment of Silence

[Deputy Mayor McEvoy]

Vocal Performance

I invite the Verona High School Chamber Choir to come forward to share their rendition of Pilgrim's Hymn by Stephen Paulas.

Closing

Thank you all for joining the Township for today's remembrance. Thank you to Deputy Mayor McEvoy for his words and my fellow council members in attendance, the township administration, State Assemblyman Al Barlas for joining us today, Verona Public Works and Buildings and Grounds, the Verona High School Chorus, The Verona Public Schools, represented by Board President Pamela Priscoe, H.B. Whitehorne Middle School, the Verona Public Schools, and the members of the Verona Police Department, Verona Rescue Squad, and Verona Fire Department for your efforts in commemorating the events of September 11, 2001.

We will never forget this day in history as we continue to remember those we lost and honor the extraordinary heroism of emergency personnel and citizens who provided aid to so many.

To assist us in this remembrance, the Township is flying the Freedom Flag on the northern-most flag pole. The blue background of the flag represents all Americans united together. The white star symbolizes all who died for freedom. The five white bars surrounding the star represent the Pentagon and the organized protection of our Country. The top red stripe symbolizes the bloodshed of those who perished at the Pentagon and the crew and passengers of flight 77. The two broad red stripes signify the twin towers and honor the bloodshed of the people who died there. The three white stripes honor the rescuers who worked tirelessly during and after the attacks. The bottom red stripe represents the heroism and loss of the crew and passengers of flight 93.

Please take a moment to observe this flag as you reflect on what this day means to you. Let us each take deliberate actions to honor the lessons and legacy of September 11, 2001 by improving the lives of others.

Thank you.