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September 11, 2001 Commemoration Ceremony
Mayor's Remembrance
Dr. Christopher Tamburro

[September 11, 2023 8:46am EDT
Verona Civic Center Monuments]

Throughout our country's history, Americans have demonstrated a thorough and consistent understanding of the powerful virtue of personal sacrifice for the sake of others. We observe this during times of war and national emergency; however, it is also evident each day in America, in community service and parenting. It is part of our spirit, captured in countless actions and memories.

There is no better place to find proof of this than the 9-11 Memorial and Museum. Each time I visit, I find myself drawn to one of the many powerful, inspirational stories of sacrifice that the museum interprets so meaningfully.

Hanging on the wall is a candid image of two firefighters, a police officer, an emergency management staffer, and a man in professional attire carrying the still body of Franciscan Friar Mychal Judge away from the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, fighting air thick with dust. Earlier that morning, Father Judge, a 19-year veteran chaplain with the New York Fire Department left Saint Francis of Assisi Church after changing into his FDNY uniform to ride with an Engine 1/Ladder 24 crew from the firehouse across 31st street to an emergency of unclear scope in lower Manhattan.

As thousands of people evacuated from the dangers of the World Trade Center, Father Judge and his cherished firefighter colleagues joined police, emergency medical personnel, and good Samaritans who raced into the chaotic scene to provide much needed assistance. Mychal immediately began ministering to emergency responders, the injured, and the deceased right outside of the incident command post at the North Tower. He was administering the last rites to a fallen firefighter when the South Tower collapsed, a piece of its debris striking him in the head. Mychal judge was assigned victim number 0001, the first officially recorded death on that grim morning.

A testament to his selfless sacrifice not only on September 11, but during his lifetime of service, 3000 people attended Father Mychal's funeral. Judge was not a hero by the manner in which he died, but rather the way he conducted his life. He once posed a question to a fellow chaplain: "Do you know what I need?" And answered: "Absolutely nothing, why am I so blessed?" The friar was prepared for this moment, understanding his place in the world.

Father Judge was a member of a legion of thousands of heroes who sacrificed their safety and too often their lives to mitigate the unprecedented disaster that was unfolding before them:

- The passengers on flight 93 fought their attackers, giving of themselves in order to prevent a further travesty on the ground.
- The 383 firefighters, EMS personnel, and police who died in the line of duty that day and the thousands more who have passed from 9/11-related illnesses.
- Employees of corporations in the World Trade Center who lost their lives shepherding their colleagues to safety.

These heroes were joined by the rest of the 2977 people whose lives tragically ended in Manhattan, the Pentagon, and in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. They gave the ultimate sacrifice that day for the great American values of freedom, democracy, individualism, and egalitarianism that Terrorists saw as repugnant to their goal of spreading fear, hatred, and authoritarianism around the world.

Our community was not immune to the forced sacrifice that was felt throughout the United States. Today, we remember Verona residents William Erwin and Stephen Roach who died that fateful morning that changed the world forever. We celebrate their lives, the loving commitment to their families, and the legacy that they have left for their survivors.

We honor 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.

America continues to lose friends and family from illnesses attributed to 9/11. This past June, I attended the funeral of H. Mickey McCabe, one of the great leaders of EMS in New Jersey who died after a long battle with lung disease stemming from his response to New York on the day of the attacks. This was a poignant reminder that we continue to feel the effects after 22 years. While we commemorate the events each year on September 11, we remember not only this day, but also the weeks, years, and decades that have followed.

As a history educator, I struggle with how to teach the events of September 11, 2001 to a generation of students born after that day, when I watched its events and those of the weeks and years after unfold. We must help our students to grasp the totality of the events, understand how the attacks represent the ever-present threat of terrorism to democracy, and analyze how these events continue to affect

our lives and government policy. The challenge is that some of these topics are abstract in the minds of our youngest generations as they have mercifully not experienced an attack of this magnitude during their lives.

On the first day of school each year, I remind my students that history is not a series of events, but rather a collection of the decisions and stories of people like them. Regardless of how many years have passed since 2001, we can share with the youngest among us the lives of those like Mychal Judge, William Erwin, Stephen Roach, Ryan McCormack, and Mickey McCabe, who each made the ultimate sacrifice, alongside thousands of Americans.

As we join together today, the families of those who perished in 2001 and 1993 are reading the names of every individual who was a victim of the attacks. Each name represents a unique story of life, loss, and resilience that is a lesson for all of us – those who can both recall the fateful day and those who did not live it. We remember those who died while honoring the many stories of extraordinary heroism of those unknown persons who, without hesitation, ran to help as the tragedy unfolded at the sites and in the days that followed. Many stories have been documented and shared, but other stories will never be recorded for posterity as the heroes died alongside all of the witnesses of their acts of valor.

We hope that their lives will inspire future generations to serve one another. That their stories will live in perpetuity in the hearts and minds of those who understand our sacred duty to our fellow humans. The rippling effects of acts of sacrifice in service of others will remind us and the world that the American spirit will remain unbroken, only to be made stronger each day.

Thank you.