

## **Township of Verona**

### **September 11 Remembrance Ceremony**

**Thursday, September 11, 2025**

**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 24<sup>th</sup> annual September 11 remembrance ceremony.

### **Prayer**

Would the Reverend Erik Simon of the First Presbyterian Church of Verona 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**

On September 11, 2001, I was a sophomore at The College of New Jersey. I can still vividly remember my roommate running into our dorm room to tell me to turn on the TV. The unimaginable had happened. The U.S. was actively suffering a large-scale terrorist attack in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. We were glued to the television while seeking additional updates on the Internet. Residents

started propping open their dorm doors, signaling open invitations for others who needed company – to talk or listen – or simply to digest these unprecedented events. We had deep and meaningful conversations with people that we had just met. Everyone seemed to have a connection, whether it be a family member or friend who worked in the World Trade Center or surrounding areas, family in the New York or Port Authority Police Departments or the FDNY, or that they had recently visited the city and admired the imposing towers which had long anchored the New York skyline while being symbols American and international prosperity.

After the attacks, we watched intently through distant cameras as events unfolded. Gradually, news media inched closer to the site and affiliates broadcast from safe points in surrounding areas like New Jersey, In horror, we learned of the increasing death toll and heard harrowing personal accounts of escape and evacuation from the lower Manhattan area. The stories of survival uplifted us, not only because we knew that they meant people were leaving dangerous areas, but because many of the accounts involved strangers banding together in mutual aid. They signaled that many people who must have felt alone saw some hope in the eyes of others.

John Labriola, a technical services consultant in 1 World Trade Center, was in the 71<sup>st</sup> Floor when the plane struck the tower. The building rocked and occupants were showered with debris, but people evacuated, not knowing what was happening around them. Labriola observed during his exit that “The people going down were very polite to one another. They helped others who needed it, and they

waited for each other. One man literally carried a woman down the steps because she was unable to make it on her own. Two others helped a guy on crutches.” 36-year-old Michael Benfante and 22-year-old John Cerqueira began to run down the stairs from their 81<sup>st</sup> floor office in the North Tower. 13 floors later, they discovered wheelchair-bound Tina Hansen unable to descend the stairs. Resisting all temptation to save themselves, the men helped her into an evacuation chair and carried her the next 68 floors. An hour later, they made it outside, only to discover that the South Tower had completely collapsed, and that the North would soon follow. These are just a few of that day’s many accounts both told, and those lost to history.

Outside, those who escaped, along with hundreds of thousands of lower Manhattan workers, attempted to find exit routes, unsure if more planes were headed in their direction,. They fought dense dust, fires, smoke, and debris as they made their way to safety. Individuals guided disoriented men and women, becoming fast friends with those whom they had never met. They gave each other much needed hope and love. Train conductors and ferry captains loaded as many on board as possible. Some people who successfully navigated escape routes courageously turned around at stations and docks to guide more survivors to safety. Everyone was united in purpose.

While the amazing stories of survival and escape continued to populate news broadcasts and conversations, we began to hear a new genre of extraordinary accounts. The tales of those running toward the World Trade Center. There were

accounts of on-duty police, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management staff racing toward the scene, eventually knowing that they faced mortal danger. The Red Cross mobilized. At the same time, off-duty staff were leaving their homes, making their way to ground zero to help. They came from the five boroughs of New York, but also from surrounding towns and states. FDNY firefighter Stephen Siller heard of the attacks after leaving work, immediately picked up his gear at the firehouse and made his way to the Brooklyn Battery tunnel to cross into Manhattan. Finding the tunnel closed to traffic, he abandoned his vehicle and ran two miles through the tunnel and through city streets with 60 pounds of equipment strapped to his back. He later died in service of others.

George Howard, a 44-year-old Port Authority Police Officer with the JFK Airport ESU, left home on his day off and moved toward the World Trade Center despite living through the 1993 bombing. He never made it home and was later found in the debris of the North Tower Collapse.

In New Jersey, residents mobilized. The Verona Rescue Squad deployed to Liberty State Park to care for evacuees and provide emergency treatment for the injured. On September 12, our ambulance and heavy rescue truck crossed the Hudson River to support efforts in Manhattan. The Summit First Aid Squad established casualty collection points at the city's train station, decontaminating, hydrating, and treating victims of 9-11. Since evacuees had looked for any route home, many found themselves in a different part of the state than where they lived. Volunteers began driving people home, one or two at a time. Restaurants and

residents brought food and water. People did what they could. Even the most basic acts of compassion profoundly affected the lives of others.

People who had never met became family. Rescuers were brothers and sisters. Barriers were broken. All hearts and minds were focused on relieving the pain of others and resisting the attempts of terrorists to threaten our resolve.

Back on the TCNJ campus, 60 miles away from the World Trade Center, the campus Emergency Medical Service joined Verona Rescue and dozens of other agencies in Jersey City. Unsure of what to do, we went to class to be with others and follow the tone of the faculty. 40 students in my law class sat vigil with our professor as he waited for the phone to ring with news of his brother who worked in the World Trade Center. While we had only known one another for few weeks, in those moments we were a family. In free moments, we found ourselves on quads for impromptu gatherings and formal rallies.

Despite the terror and anguish that we faced on September 11, 2001 and in the days and months that followed, the United States experienced a sense of unity unlike any my generation had ever experienced. We were one people, bonded by our shared humanity, together in grief, love for our country, and the quest for a new sense of security so that our great American values could endure. We mourned our losses while offering a clear signal to the world that our centuries-old collective spirit would remain unbroken.

In the weeks and months following that fateful day, Annin Flag Company, once headquartered in Verona, could not produce American Flags quickly enough to

meet demand. These symbols of American endurance were displayed on so many homes and vehicles that blocks resembled paintings by impressionist Childe Hassam in his famous “Flag Series” that he created to convey patriotism, national unity, and hope as the U.S. inched toward participation in World War I. One could simply walk down the street or look out the window and feel a part of something greater. Friends and neighbors more routinely checked on and called one another. People were open with their feelings and responses, knowing that they would be met with compassionate ears. In a time when our basic security was uncertain, when we had suffered previously unimaginable national trauma, when individuals suffered painful losses, we were more united than ever.

On September 11, Americans proved that we can defy the odds to band together in the most difficult of circumstances. Thus, we must be able to do so in better, safer, and more stable times when we can do so deliberately, with purpose. We cannot wait for tragedy to unite us, nor for trauma to bond us. Americans possess such a tremendous capacity to be one nation. Communities like ours have constructed beautiful physical memorials like this to remember the lost and those who continue to live with trauma, but we can go one step further. We can honor all those whose lives were cut short or who served as examples of bravery and compassion by striving to break down barriers and build unity through our actions and attitudes. Reaching out to neighbors, identifying common ground rather than differences, and building from our shared strengths will foster better communities on the local, state, and national levels. Deliberate and sustained efforts will

generate an enduring shared memorial of spirit and unity that we can carry every day in our hearts and minds as we fulfill our common promise.

America is at its best when we are united by our enduring values and shared vision. When we are encumbered by pernicious divisiveness, we must intentionally pause and look deeply in our own hearts, souls, and minds, then choose to eschew the temptation to separate ourselves and instead deliberately foster the bonds and connections allow us to realize the great potential of our country and communities.

When division tugs and tears at the fibers that unify us, we must work deliberately to repair each strand with understanding and commitment to one another. We must live to perpetuate the ideals that terrorists threatened. We must work to be a unified people. We must remember our lost like Verona Residents Billy Erwin and Stephen Roach not only our words and thoughts, but with our actions.

We must 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, and 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, 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. I would also like to recognize Retired FDNY Firefighter and Verona Resident Pete Mueller of Ladder 6 who is in attendance. Pete serves our community as crossing guard.

I would like to also recognize the members of the Verona 9-11 memorial committee who constructed this beautiful monument. If you are in attendance, please raise your hand.

Ben Blinder  
Doug Huber

I had the opportunity recently to attend a seminar on the Brooklyn Wall of Remembrance which includes pictures of all 417 first responders and K-9 Sirius who made the ultimate sacrifice 24 years ago. The memorial was conceived and

chaired by Verona Resident Sol Molgren. I have brought some information about the with me that will be at the lectern following the service. Please consider visiting this amazing place.

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.

When you leave here today, please take a moment to reflect on what this day means to you. We should all consider our roles in building enduring unity in America. Let us each take deliberate actions to honor the lessons and legacy of September 11, 2001. Let us strive to be who were in the days and months that followed.

Thank you.