

# JURY POOL

# NEWS

A New York State Unified Court System publication highlighting the latest court initiatives and related news

## A LETTER TO JURORS FROM CHIEF JUDGE JUDITH S. KAYE

WHO AMONG US WILL EVER FORGET where they were on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001? It is another one of those days that will live forever in infamy.

On that fateful day, I was in Albany, at a Session of the Court of Appeals. We all watched with horror and disbelief the events unfolding at the World Trade Center. Among the first decisions I had to make was whether to attend a national Conference on Access to Justice that evening in Albany—which I did. I was somewhat surprised to find hundreds of others there as well—all of us stunned, saddened but steadfast in our determination to go forward with our initiatives, not to succumb, not to capitulate to the evil forces of terrorism.

I mention that evening in Albany because events since September 11 have had a common quality. They are filled with people happy to be together, to touch flesh, to hug one another, to grieve with and for those who have lost loved ones, to reaffirm their resolve to keep this nation strong.

I expected the list of members of our court family directly impacted by the disaster to be a substantial list—I've seen so many somber faces and red eyes. But frankly I was astonished to see more than 50 names. The list includes judges, court personnel, even outside New York City, who have lost spouses, children, siblings, close family and friends—firefighters, police officers, World Trade Center employees, investment bankers, lawyers. And of course we all mourn with the families of Harry Thompson, Mitch Wallace and Tommy Jurgens, our valiant court officers who—along with their selfless colleagues—rushed to help at Ground Zero, but did not return. This isn't the way it was supposed to be, for any of these good, kind, decent people, or for us.

At the gatherings I have attended, invariably I am immensely moved by our celebration of America. Never before have I heard the words of the Pledge of Allegiance or the Star Spangled Banner uttered with such passion and

sincerity, or seen so many people moved to tears by them. God Bless America, land that we love. And are we not the face of America, immigrants from many lands, people of all faiths and persuasions with diverse dreams and ambitions, but of one mind: to protect and preserve the precious freedoms and opportunities we enjoy as Americans.

How will we honor our heroes, our lost loved ones? By remembering them; by carrying them in our hearts always.

There are no words to bring comfort and closure to their families, but we don't need words to give everlasting meaning to their sacrifice. We do that when we honor the values for which they gave their lives; when we stand strong and united in our hopes and prayers for this great land; and when we give daily reality, in our court-houses, to the ideals that make this nation great.

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Jurors long ago earned a special place in my heart, but their dedication in recent weeks has been exemplary. With lower Manhattan in disorder—the courts inaccessible by phone and virtually unreachable by public transportation—jurors still showed up in the hundreds, despite our public announcements. Many declined offers to be excused.

And talk of stories—we have loads of them. Like the retired firefighter who wanted only a short deferment of jury service because he was committed to working at Ground Zero. And the man who managed to get a message through from Philadelphia, where he was with family, mourning the loss of his firefighter son, to let us know why he was not responding to his summons. What an extraordinary display of dedication, patriotism, commitment to our system of justice.

Above all, in good times and hard times, I simply want to say thank you. Thank you for your jury service. Thank you for your part in making our courts, and our legal system, work. Thank you for helping us show the world the high value we place on the American justice system. ♦