

Tribute to the Sacrifices Made on September 11, 2001
Bronx County Hall of Justice
September 11, 2008

Administrative Judge Bronx Supreme Court Criminal Division John Collins: The commanding officer at this facility, Major Jose Rodriguez, will lead us now in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

Major Jose Rodriguez: I pledge Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

Administrative Judge Collins: While the Criminal Division of Supreme Court is now located here, our civil branch remains at 851 Grand Concourse. It was from its southern windows on September 11, 2001 at a distance of 11 miles that we watched the smoke rising from the fall of the Twin Towers. Justice Barry Salman serves as the administrative judge of the Civil Division and we welcome him here today, Judge Salman.

Administrative Judge Bronx Supreme Court Civil Division Barry Salman: Thank you, Judge Collins. Judge Collins, Judge Pfau, fellow jurists, the families and friends and relatives of those who lost loved ones on 9/11. On behalf of the entire court family, I wish to welcome you to this most solemn memorial service. We have set aside a moment in our busy schedules to remember and keep alive the memories we have of the victims who tragically lost their lives on 9/11/2001. We in the court family suffered a truly personal loss of our own court officers: Captain Harry Thompson, Sergeant Mitchell Wallace and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens. We must also remember the

heroic deeds of those who responded without regard for their own safety, many who remain anonymous. For the survivors, time may dull but cannot relieve the pain. No memorial service or dedication can completely soothe the hurt felt for those who lost loved ones, but by gathering as we do today they will know we feel for them and remember. The National September 11th Memorial Museum and Plaza being dedicated today will honor those in the terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993. This national tribute will bear witness to the attacks to commemorate those who risked their lives to save others, recognize the thousands who survived, and reflect upon the unity and compassion shown in the aftermath. We must remain vigilant as terror has a means of raising its head and becoming a reality. Again, I thank you all for your attendance.

Administrative Judge Collins: Please rise now as the Cardinal Hayes High School Band leads us in our national anthem.

Cardinal Hayes High School Band plays the national anthem.

Administrative Judge Collins: It is important that we mark each anniversary of 9/11. This is especially so since three of our uniformed officers made the supreme sacrifice. We welcome now the chief of public safety to the New York State Courts, Chief Jewel Williams.

Chief of the Department of Public Safety Jewel Williams: Welcome, family, friends, and colleagues. On this day for the past seven years we have come together to remember our heroes. There is a simple definition of “hero” that I would like to share with you: Someone who acts to help another with no thought for herself or himself, someone who is admired for achievements or noble qualities. Our uniformed heroes, who number many, exemplify this simple definition of “hero.” Today I would like to speak about some of the noble qualities of the three heroes we will never forget, our three court officers who sacrificed their lives for others: Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Thomas Jurgens, and Sergeant Mitchell Wallace. These officers took pride in their service to the public, pride in the uniform, and pride in the small acts of heroism they performed daily throughout their careers. Each of them in their own way made it a practice to perform above and beyond. Harry, in addition to instructing at the New York State Court Officers Academy, always made time to counsel recruits and other officers and in achieving and maintaining the standards necessary to be the best officer possible. Tommy, on perimeter patrol, became a wealth of information on how to best navigate the sometimes complex judicial system. He became very adept at disseminating this knowledge to the public of the municipal law and enforcement agencies while still performing his perimeter duties. Mitchell, always willing to provide aid to those who were in need of medical assistance on or off duty or just giving to those who needed assurances that everything would work out fine. Those of us who knew them, friends, family, and colleagues were not surprised to hear that without a moment’s hesitation or concern for their safety and well-being they responded to the catastrophic event unfolding at the World Trade Center on 9/11/01, which brings us full circle back to the beginning, the simple definition, my definition, our definition of “hero”: Harry, Tom and Mitch.

At this time, I would ask the family members of our court officers to please stand and be

acknowledged. From the Jurgens family we have John Callie, Justin Callie, Linda Jurgens, Brad Jurgens, Bruce Blakeman, Joey Jurgens, Jessie Jurgens, Bob Blakeman, Jim Jurgens, Joe Jurgens and Barbara Jurgens. From the Wallace family we have Noreen McDonough, Rena Wallace, Ken Wallace and Bruce Wallace. Please remain standing because you will notice that we have no representatives from the Thompson family at this time. I'm happy to let you know that Harry's son Rahsaan will be getting married tomorrow and they wanted me to let you know that they are here in spirit, but they are rehearsing for that joyous occasion tomorrow. Thank you so much.

Administrative Judge Collins: We are pleased to have other law enforcement agencies join us here today in addition to the judges, the clerks, the court attorneys, and the court officers of this command, representatives of the District Attorney's Office, and members of his staff, court officers from the Supreme Court Civil, the Civil Court of the City of New York, the Criminal Court of the City of New York, and the Family Court, representatives of the New York City Police and Fire Department, and the New York City Department of Correction, as well as the lawyers who work in this court and the private Bar, the Legal Aid Society, Bronx Defenders and assigned counsel. We are honored by your presence on this occasion. For 49 years our neighbor to the south has been Cardinal Hayes High School. Erected in 1941 it has a student body of 1,100 young men and has alumni numbering 25,000, many of whom work in this building as court officers, clerks and judges. The school's president, Joseph Tierney, and its principal, Mr. William Lessa, have been generous in allowing the Hayes Band to come here today. Now under the direction of Mr. Timothy Thorne, their musical director, we will hear their rendition of America, The Beautiful. (Band plays.)

Administrative Judge Collins: The Bronx Bar Association is over 100 years old. This association of lawyers on the civil and criminal sides of the court represents an active, vibrant group seeking to support our community in many ways. After 9/11 there was a call for lawyers to volunteer in aiding survivors and families of the victims. The lawyers of the Bronx Bar were not found wanting. They were in the forefront of the volunteers. Representing the Bronx Bar Association today we are delighted to present its new president, Ms. Lucille Barbato.

Bronx County Bar Association President Lucille Barbato: Thank you, Judge Collins. Judge Pfau, Judge Salman, Judge Collins, distinguished guests, family members of the court officers who lost their lives seven years ago today in the tragic event that changed all of our lives, especially yours, and everyone here today, my fellow New Yorkers and citizens. As president of the Bronx County Bar Association on behalf of our members I am honored and humbled to stand here today and to be a part of this special program where we are honoring heroes. I first must acknowledge the music provided by the students of Cardinal Hayes High School. Hearing your performance of patriotic songs today makes me proud to be an American. I look at your young faces and I see goodness on a day that unfortunately reminds us that evil exists in this world. You are the promise of our future. You represent the youth of our country and make us realize how important it is to have ceremonies like this one so none of us forget what happened on September 11, 2001, especially for your sake and the sake of all young people because you are our future heroes. We must never forget what happened seven years ago for another reason. We must honor our fellow citizens whose lives were taken by senseless acts of terrorism and we must pay our respects to their families. That is the least we could do. It certainly could have been any one of us. Today we are remembering three members of our courthouse family, three court officers who died while

doing their job of keeping others safe and secure as court officers do every day. To their families we must say how sorry we are for your loss. We must also thank you for allowing us to share this day with you. We all may not have known your loved ones personally, but having court officers as friends and also interacting with them often in the Bronx courthouse we know how special your loved ones are. They will forever remain in our memories as true heroes. Today we will also be recognizing the recent heroic acts of one of our Bronx court officers. He reminds us that even though we lost some sense of security as a result of being attacked on September 11th, real present day heroes are always near us and around us, if not within each and every one of us, and we should never lose our faith in the goodness of people or else the terrorists will have already won. May we never forget what happened on September 11, 2001 and let us always honor our heroes, past, present and in the future.

Administrative Judge Collins: Seven years ago, former Governor Hugh Carey representing the then governor spoke at the funeral of one of our court officers. He stated that while all the debts on 9/11 were noble, there was a difference between the death of other first responders and that of our three court officers. He said the other first responders who had perished had duties which placed them at the location of the disaster. The court officers, the three who died and others who survived, were not there as a result of any assignment. They responded out of the goodness of their hearts to help brother and sister citizens. Our officers have a tradition of such help of performing noble deeds beyond the call of duty of saving and attempting to save the lives of others. That tradition still continues. Each year in Albany on May 1st the chief judge recognizes one who has given of himself or herself in a special way with the Chief Judge Awards, the Merit Award for Heroism. Last May it was awarded to an officer of this command, Court Officer

Timmy L. Cowart, Jr. I ask him to rise while I read the chief judge's citation. The citation reads that on April 17, 2007 Officer Timmy Cowart, Jr., left home to commute to work here. He was riding the subway when he looked out of the car's open door and overheard an argument between two men. The argument quickly turned into a fight and the men fell into the tracks oblivious to the third rail. Officer Cowart jumped down onto the tracks close to the electrified third rail. By the time he got to them, the two had managed to knock each other unconscious and were sprawled near the third rail. Cowart stood over the men to protect them from further harm until several bystanders came to his aid and helped him carry the two miscreants to safety. Officer Cowart just described his reaction as natural, the right thing to do. We regard it as being far more. We salute him in recognition of his selfless and skillful action. Thank you and congratulations, Officer Timmy Cowart, Jr.

Administrative Judge Collins: New York state is a fairly vast geographical entity stretching from Montauk to Buffalo, from Binghamton to the Canadian border. As you can appreciate, a court system for such a large state must be vast as well. Now 13 separate districts it is presided over administratively by Chief Administrative Judge Ann Pfau. We are pleased to have her join us here today, Judge Pfau.

Chief Administrative Judge Ann Pfau: Good afternoon. On behalf of Judge Kaye -- Chief Judge Kaye, who's at the Court of Appeals today and can't be with us, I want to thank you all for being here for our ceremony which we hold every year to remember the heroes, the sacrifices, and the tragic events of September 11, 2001. I particularly want to acknowledge and welcome the family members and friends of our beloved officers who gave their lives while saving others on

that day: Captain Harry Thompson, Sergeant Tommy Jurgens, and Sergeant Mitch Wallace.

Thank you. Thank you for being with us once again. Seven years after the attacks, an unimaginable seven years, we are still touched to our very core by our loss, still inspired daily by the quiet courage of our officers and their heroic dedication to their fellow New Yorkers. We are slowly moving forward and healing, as we must, but on this day of all days, the wounds and memories are fresh and they're painful. We would not be coming together in ceremonies like this all around the country but for the cowardly events that took thousands of innocent lives. Yet, we all realized from the very beginning there is so much more to the story of September 11 than the attacks and the senseless violence. From the very moment that our city's first responders began racing to the scene of the World Trade Center, the story of September 11th transcended the attacks and became the story that lives on, the story of heroism, compassion, unity, and the very best that human nature has to offer. When thousands of uniformed heroes, including Harry, Tommy and Mitch, rushed to the scene of the attacks, every single one of them knew the gravity of the situation and sensed the immediate danger and threat to their own lives, and yet they went ahead and risked everything they had to save others. Through their action by risking and losing their lives to rescue and provide aid and comfort to the injured, they taught us more eloquently than words ever could about humanity and about compassion and how these can never ever be extinguished. They demonstrated with their lives the goodwill to always be there to oppose and conquer evil. They showed the entire world the value we place on human life. With their self-sacrifice our first responders, our brave officers deprive the terrorists of the victory, gave us the inspiration, confidence that we need to deal with our grief and shock, and begin the healing process and, most of all, they gave us the strength to look forward with the future with hope once again. Those are the central lessons and chapters of the 9/11 story, but make no mistake, those

chapters were written with the immeasurable sacrifices of our uniform heroes fallen and standing including our three fallen brothers. That is why we come together this afternoon and why we will continue to come together, on this date every year, first and foremost to honor their heroism, to remember who they were, what they mean to us, and what they sacrificed to keep them alive in our hearts by telling and retelling the story of their lives and their courageous deeds, to honor them, and to honor their family and friends, to remember the over 70 members of our court family who lost loved ones in the tragedy, as well as thousands of people all across America and the world who lost loved ones seven years ago today.

I'm so pleased to be here in the Bronx for this year's program for many reasons. I can't think of a more appropriate place to gather than right here in the Bronx Hall of Justice, this new courthouse, one of the largest in the world where every single day justice is done and the rule of law is preserved. The second reason is that it gives me the opportunity to say thank you in person. On 9/11 and in the days and weeks that followed, we saw an unbelievable outpouring of support and assistance from our court officers and court staff, all over the state, but nowhere more so than in the Bronx. To this day we remain grateful to you and to everyone who worked so hard to keep the New York State courts open in the face of the attacks and to open the Manhattan courts before anyone thought it was possible. Now I'm so pleased I have a third reason for being so glad that we selected the Bronx, the wonderful students from Cardinal Hayes High School. Let's just recognize them. (Applause.)

There is something special and wonderful about the Bronx. Thank you, Reverend Tierney and Mr. Thorne, and to the absolutely spectacular students. We're very grateful. Today, September 11, 2008, is a date to recall the memories and deeds of Harry Thompson, Mitch Wallace, and Tommy Jurgens to keep them alive in our hearts and take strength from their example. Seven years later

we are still in awe of what they did. Today also presents us with an opportunity to pledge never to take for granted the uniform officers who make it their calling to protect and represent our justice system and who since 9/11 have kept the spirit of our fallen heroes alive in their personal and professional lives.

We take this opportunity to show our respect and appreciation for those who knew and served with our officers and those who followed their footsteps. Let us also use this moment to reaffirm our own commitment to Harry, to Tommy, and to Mitch, to recognize that each day we have together is a blessing, and that we will work every day together to follow their example, to renew our personal pledge, to uphold the highest standards of service to the public as they did so that we will keep the flame of their memory alive forever. We will never ever forget. Thank you and thank you for being here.

Administrative Judge Collins: We thank you all for joining us today, those present in our new Bronx Hall of Justice, and those throughout the state joining us by video. We ask you to continue to remember 9/11, its victims, and their families. We thank once again the students from Cardinal Hayes High School who participated today and their principal and president and their musical director, Mr. Thorne. Please rise now and we will close these proceedings by asking the Cardinal Hayes High School Band to play God Bless America.