

Chief Joseph Baccellieri:

Good morning and welcome to the New York State Unified Court System's commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on our nation. We gather to honor and remember our three fallen heroes, Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Thomas Jurgens, and Sergeant Mitchel Wallace, and all of those lost on that tragic day. Let this serve as a reminder of our commitment to never forget. Their actions epitomize the true spirit of America and their bravery reflects the values that first responders dedicate themselves to helping others, no matter the cost.

People needed help. Brave men and women answered the call, putting themselves in harm's way. Some, by the grace of God, survived. Many did not and paid the ultimate price and their loved ones continue to grieve their loss to this day. No words can ever assuage such a loss so deep. We can only hope that our steadfast commitment to honor them provides some level of comfort.

At this time, I'd ask that you stand for the presentation of the colors by the New York State Courts Ceremonial Unit. We now invite Lieutenant Vincent Sinclair to lead us in the pledge of allegiance.

Lieutenant Vincent
Sinclair:

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.

Chief Joseph
Baccellieri:

Please remain standing as we invite Sergeant Peter Robinson, who drove down this morning from Buffalo, New York to be here with us as we invite him to sing our National Anthem.

Sergeant Peter
Robinson:

Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming. Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight, o'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming. And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh say, does that star spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri:

Thank you, Sergeant Robinson. Would everyone please be seated? Next on our program is a musical salute by the New York State Courts Pipes and Drums in honor of our heroes.

Thank you so much to our pipes and drummers.

Now I'd like to introduce our dais and I'd ask that they stand as I announce them. The Chief Judge of the State of New York, the Honorable Janet DiFiore. Chief Administrative Judge of the State of New York, the Honorable Lawrence Marks. Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, the Honorable Edwina Mendelson. Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Courts Outside of New York City, the Honorable Norman St. George. Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the New York City Courts, the Honorable George Silver. Chief of Department, Michael Magliano. Seated in our audience from the Office of Court Administration, Chief of Operations Nancy Barry, Esquire. Chief of Administration, Justin Barry, Esquire.

We are also so very thankful to have members of the Jurgens and Wallace families with us today. As well as members of the judiciary high ranking uniform personnel, unions, fraternal organizations, friends, and colleagues seated in our audience, as well as joining us virtually. Now, it is my privilege to invite the Chief Judge, the Honorable Janet DiFiore to address the assembly. Your Honor?

Chief Judge Janet DiFiore:

Good morning everyone and thank you for joining in the Unified Court System's commemoration of the 20th anniversary, the 20th anniversary of 9/11. So, for all of us, I know that the events of September 11th are seared and etched forever in our hearts and in our minds. And on that day, we witnessed the very worst, but most importantly, the very best of human nature.

Within minutes after that first plane struck the North Tower on what we all remember was a beautiful sunny September morning, within minutes scores of our New York State Court Officers reflexively and instinctively joined the thousands of first responders who were rushing to that scene. Rushing to a scene to help, to assist, and to render aid in what, at that very moment, not a single one of them could have comprehended or imagined what had happened and what was in store for all of them and for all of us. And through their selfless acts and through their enormous, enormous courage, hundreds of those heroes lost their lives, including of course, Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace, and Sergeant Jurgens.

We will never forget the courage of these men. We will never ever forget the sacrifice that they each made on our behalf. And I'm so pleased to see their family members here, and particularly the youngest members of these heroes families, because it's so very important to honor and remind everyone of their bravery and their sacrifices made on behalf of all of us. And along with that, we will never forget the courage of the officers that day, who thankfully survived those events, and in the face of continuing danger to themselves, they remained at the scene and they risked their lives to rescue, to provide aid and comfort to the thousands of folks who were there at that scene and injured on that day. And we won't forget the hundreds of court officers who volunteered and assisted in the rescue and recovery efforts and worked at the operation there for days and weeks and months among toxic dust and debris there.

And of course, and finally, we will never forget the officers who have fallen ill since then and those who have tragically passed away as a result of their exposure to the toxins that we know were present at Ground Zero. And so on this 20th anniversary of 9/11 to honor the memory of our uniformed heroes, we're debuting a remarkable new video that documents the recollections of eight of our court officers, all eight, still with the court system today, who were each awarded the medal of valor in 2002 by Chief Judge Kaye for their heroic acts on the morning of September 11th.

It is a moving and unforgettable video, which you will see for yourself. And I want to thank the officers who appear in that video for sharing their 9/11 experiences and for allowing us to relive the events of that day through their eyes, including their final memories of Captain Thomas, Sergeant Wallace, and Sergeant Jurgens. I do believe, and I think that you will all agree, that this video should stand as an enduring homage to our New York Court officers and to the thousands of uniformed heroes who so magnificently executed their sworn duty to serve and protect us. Their individual and their collective courage and their selflessness lifted the hopes of an entire nation, offering us the strength and the resolve and the courage that we needed to move forward as a united and resilient people.

I believe that the commitment and dedication that was on display on that horrible, unspeakable day is the very same commitment and dedication that continues to animate the service of our uniform court officers each and every day. And so on behalf of all of us to each of you, we express our gratitude and appreciation for your service, particularly over these last 18 months, as you helped and assisted and assured us that our courts would remain safely open to service the justice needs of our fellow New Yorkers, all across the state.

So to all of you, our court officers, we say thank you for a job well done. And thank you for your service. God bless you and your families, and may God bless the United States of America.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri:

Thank you, Your Honor. Now I'd like to ask Chief Administrative Judge, the Honorable Lawrence Marks, to come to the podium to address the assembly, Your Honor?

Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks:

Thank you, Chief Baccellieri and good morning to everyone. Tomorrow marks 20 years since the horrific attacks on the Twin Towers, which took the lives of nearly 3,000 people. Today, as we've done every year, we gather to remember and to honor those individuals who were taken from us. We lost three of our own that day, Captain William, Harry Thompson, Sergeant Mitchel Wallace, and

Sergeant Thomas Jurgens. Three selfless, brave, heroic officers who sacrificed everything to protect, serve, and save their fellow New Yorkers.

We carry the memory of these three heroes with us every day. And two years ago, our new training academy was dedicated to them so that they may continue to inspire court officers for years to come. The courage that Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace, and Sergeant Jurgens displayed that day will forever endure in our hearts and our minds. We extend our deepest sympathy and warmest wishes to their families on this day of remembrance.

It is impossible to fully appreciate how difficult these past 20 years have been for each of you, but we hope you find comfort in knowing the tremendous impact each of these men has had on every one of us in the court system, and on so many more New Yorkers and Americans. Along with the scores of court officers who aided in recovery efforts in the days following the attacks, our court family, saw 23 other court officers, race to the World Trade Center on that fateful day. 23 men and women who risked great danger to themselves to rescue others. We are immensely grateful for their acts of courage as first responders that day. To show our gratitude and to honor these men and women, as the Chief Judge noted, we've created a video presentation, which you will see in a few minutes, with several of those officers sharing their memories of the attacks and the immediate aftermath.

Unfortunately, our nation is now facing another very different crisis. The pandemic has been especially difficult for our city and state. New York was hard hit in March 2020, and our struggles continue today. Yet once again, and to no one's surprise, court officers displayed similar courage and selflessness in the face of the pandemic, standing strong and ensuring that our courts remained open and continued to serve the public.

We can be sure that their actions were inspired by Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace, Sergeant Jurgens, and the 23 other officers who were responders to the Twin Towers two decades ago. We are fortunate and thankful that 23 of our officers returned from the Twin Towers safely on that terrible day, and we are eternally saddened that we cannot bring Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace, and Sergeant Jurgens back to us and their families, but we can live each and every day in appreciation of the enormous sacrifice they made.

We will never forget their extraordinary heroism and we will forever, deeply mourn their loss. Their courage remains a great inspiration to all of us. Please join me in thanking the heroic men and women, and especially Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace, and Sergeant Jurgens, who 20 years ago went far beyond their call of duty to save and protect fellow New Yorkers. Thank you.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri:

Thank you, Your Honor. Next in our program is the video tribute, Reflections of 9/11.

Reflections of 9/11

Lt. Kathryn Negron: You never know, when it's going to hit you, that those feelings or the memories come flooding in and you get emotional.

Chief Alfred Moscola: You don't know when you're going to be called upon or for what you're going to be called upon.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: In crisis, that's when you find out how strong brotherhood, or sisterhood is.

Lt. Edwin Kennedy: It was never a fear about the buildings coming down, it was about us going here to help. We're going to the World Trade Center to help.

Major Andrew Wender: We made our way over there not really realizing at the time what was going on.

Captain Tyree Bacon: We knew we were on a mission. You know we were just trying to get in to help. As we crossed the street, I remember Tommy making the sign of the cross, and I followed suit and I did the same. I remember getting off the train at the Canal Street subway station. It was a beautiful day. I had signed out my portable radio, I was in a locker room having my cup of tea, and we heard the first airplane fly by, really low. It actually caught our attention.

Lt. Edwin Kennedy: Then two, three seconds later, you heard a big explosion, and it was newspaper, just paper everywhere.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: We didn't see any plane debris; we saw what looked like confetti floating around in the air and we just couldn't figure out what it was. And so, we're trained in first aid, and the first inclination is let's go down there and see how we can help.

Captain Tyree Bacon: They were gathering medical bags, oxygen.

Lt. Kathryn Negron: We grabbed rubber gloves, face shields, in case we had to do CPR.

Lt. Edwin Kennedy: Harry Thompson was giving out the blue nitrile gloves.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: We were literally fighting our way through the streets to get to the tower.

Major Andrew Wender: One thing I do remember clearly was when we got there, it looked a lot worse in the lobby than I thought it would. There were some signs that were hanging down. There was water that was coming down from the sprinklers. You could smell the jet fuel, chaos, as far as people coming in and out.

SCO Elayne Kittel: Just debris everywhere. And then the people jumping out of the buildings. And then I lost sight of Harry and anyone else from the academy actually. But I never saw Harry again.

Lt. Kathryn Negron: We were in front of the building, and we were helping direct people to come out.

Lt. Edwin Kennedy: So we were just grabbing the people, waving them on across the street to where they had set up a triage.

Captain Tyree Bacon: Somebody was carrying out a woman who had a leg injury, actually turned out to be burns, and Mitch, without skipping a beat got on his hands and knees and started treating her.

SCO Andrew Scagnelli: There were two people, an old lady who's having a hard time getting the block [inaudible 00:18:16], and another gentleman. So, I grabbed them both. I put them behind the pillar, I took my shirt off, put it on all of our heads.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: So we made the decision that we're going to start to ascend the staircase. See if we could do floor by floor searches and help anywhere we can. Our little band of brothers, the three of us, decided that whatever floor we went to and we did a search, we did whatever we had to do, we would not leave the floor without the three of us being together again.

Major Andrew Wender: I remember the staircases being narrower than I thought they would be. It was actually difficult to get up because so many people were trying to get out so quickly.

Captain Tyree Bacon: We threw the medical equipment in there, the stair chair, the tech bag, there was an O2 case, oxygen. And we just started running. So now it's me, Tommy, Harry, and Mitch. We made our way down the stairs all the way to the bottom. There was a female, a young female, Hispanic female, wearing pink with her arms standing out. A burn victim. Her hair was singed. And I turned around and said, well, she's a critical patient. I'll take her.

Lt. Kathryn Negron: And then all of a sudden you know; it was like a rumble.

Lt. Edwin Kennedy: It was a woop, woop, woop. It's like metal vibrating.

Chief Alfred Moscola: But we made it up, clearing the floors to 51 and the 51st floor. And then we got thrown down the stairs and we didn't know what had happened.

Captain Tyree Bacon: I got blown to the ground and literally shot across the floor. I'm estimating probably about 100 feet.

Lt. Edwin Kennedy: We hear on our radio, "Help." I think that was the last time I heard Tommy Jurgens calling for help.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: All of a sudden, the building started to shake violently. Lights started to dim, and it was at that point we started to hear the radios blasting to vacate the building. Evacuate.

Major Andrew Wender: Just imagine the rubble from the first tower that collapsed, so certainly no easy decision to run out. But then you realize that after a couple of minutes, trying to figure out what to do.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: As we started to make our way out of the building, you started to hear, it was like a hissing sound almost. I remember looking up and seeing a window starting to explode as the building started to pancake down.

Major Andrew Wender: I remember seeing the shadow of the tower falling and I'm thinking, this is it.

Lt. Kathryn Negron: And we just kept running. And then the next thing you know, it's darkness. And I was thrown up in the air sort of dark, and I remember thinking, I can't believe that I'm going to die.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: And I recall on the ground gasping for air screaming, Al, Andrew, where are you? Al, Andrew, where are you? And I hear on return somebody scream out to me, "If you hear my voice, come to it." It's totally black. I'm telling you it was as dark as you could imagine, even though it was a bright, sunny day. I crawled to this voice. And in a second I feel somebody grab me, the air clears, and I find myself in a bagel shop, grabbed by a firefighter, brought to the back of the bagel shop, where we cleaned my airway, hosed me down, and then I kept going outside trying to find Al and Andrew and anybody else I could find in the room.

SCO Elayne Kittel: There's a wrought iron fence around that church. And you literally could not see one centimeter in front of your face. So I grabbed onto the wrought iron fence, and that's how I got myself up that street, up to Broadway. Bar by bar.

SCO Andrew Scagnelli: The blocks were littered with purses and high heels. Bigger overcoats that people just wanted to shed to get moving.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: The community affairs officer walked over at me and asked our name. I told him my name. He said, where were you? I told him we were on the 51st on the North Tower. He took a step back and he says, "You know you're lucky you're alive?" And I says, "I do." He goes, "We have no patients here. Nobody survived." I started to get pieces of uniforms from members of the staff who were covered in debris because I knew we had to preserve this as a historical article. So, I put this stuff in a trash bag, wrapped it up, I put it in a cardboard

box, and I've opened the box twice since 9/11. It's all covered in World Trade Center dust. When you open it, not only do you see the dust, but the smell brings you right back to that thing. It's horrible, which is why I'm reluctant to open it. But it's important for people to see the uniform of a New York State Court officer. We lost three court officers that day. But scores of court officers responded to that scene. You want them to be acknowledged. And so, I feel obligated to tell our story so that people know that court officers, just like every other first responder, right? Did their part on that horrific day.

Captain Tyree Bacon: I do want to say Tommy, Harry, and Mitch are not heroes because they died. They're heroes because the way they lived. And the memories I have of them were them treating people right up to their very last moments. And that's what made them heroes.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: That was the first time I saw it, so forgive me. That's an extremely powerful video and I want to acknowledge two individuals in particular that brought that video to fruition. Mary Kornman, from the Division of Public Affairs and David Handshuh who not only is the person who interviewed us, did the photography, he's roaming around this room right now, but David on 9/11 was also a victim. He was pinned by a steel girder when the buildings came down, and he was carried to safety by a chief FDNY paramedic. And so you can imagine how difficult it is for us to talk about that day, and David was doing it many times over as he interviewed us. And we are truly grateful for David and the work he put into bringing this video to fruition so that we can try as best we can to share what we experienced on that day and what our three heroes experienced.

And as Captain Ty Bacon said, they're heroes not because they died, they are heroes because of the way they lived. And I personally worked with Captain William Harry Thompson, him and I shared an office together. And there's not a day that goes by that I don't think of him. And he was a decent, warm, loving, human being, and I can say to this day, I learned so much from him and I try very, very hard to put into action many of the things that we discussed when we were alone on our office together, and just talking about life and raising children.

So, thank you again, Mary, thank you again, David, we appreciate your efforts. David had me crying downstairs before I even saw the video, so I knew I was in for a real emotional time. Next in our ceremony is a very special presentation to the Chief Judge, made by Mr. Michael Stanko.

Michael Stanko: [inaudible 00:26:41].

Chief Judge Janet DiFiore: So, on behalf of all of us in the Unified Court System, we thank you. This is a beautiful piece of art to commemorate our heroes that we honor today. And remember those sacrifices [inaudible 00:27:50] will be prominently and proudly displayed for all New Yorkers to see. So, thank you very much.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: Thank you, Michael. It's beautiful. Next in our program, I'd like to invite Court Officer Lethisha Lynch to sing her rendition of God Bless America.

Court Officer Lethisha Lynch:

God bless America, land that I love. Stand beside her and guide her, through the night with a light from above. From the mountains, to the prairies, to the oceans, white with foam, God bless America, my home sweet home. God bless America, my home sweet home.

Chief Joseph Baccellieri: Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes our ceremony. We, again, thank all of you for taking time out of your busy day to be with us and I ask that you always hold Harry, Mitch, and Tom close to your hearts and remember them always. I also want to thank, and due to the generosity of the New York State's Supreme Court Officers Association, Pat Cullen, President, and Vice President's Pat O'Malley and Anthony Vasquez to when you leave today for a trip home, grab yourself something to eat. They provided the food truck that's outside. I hope you have an enjoyable day and I hope that you always remember that we will always remember. We will never forget. So, thank you again for being here. God bless you all and God bless the United States of America.