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Gone, but never forgotten: Brunswick County honors heroes

By Sam Hickman

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SUPPLY — Never forget — That's the message retired firefighters sent to a patriotic crowd at Brunswick Community College on the 13th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks that took the lives of nearly 3,000 American civilians, including 343 New York City firefighters.



Staff photo by Sam Hickman

There was no shortage of patriotism at a Sept. 11 memorial ceremony to honor 343 New York City firefighters and other victims who lost their lives during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

For the 11th consecutive year, a memorial service was held on the BCC campus by the Carolinas Retirees Association of the Fire Department of New York after a motorcade left South Carolina.

The events at the memorial ceremony included the ringing of the 5-5-5 Bells and the raising of a flag that flew over ground zero in New York during rescue and recovery operations. Guest speakers included Sheriff John Ingram, BCC President Dr. Susanne Adams and Brunswick County Emergency Services Director Brian Watts. Various professional and volunteer fire departments from across Brunswick County also attended the ceremony to show support for their fallen firefighters.

It also featured a singer, Ellen Parish, who sang "God Bless America" and "Danny Boy." Bagpiper Kevin Mulholland paid tribute to the fallen with a rendition of "Amazing Grace," while "The Star-Spangled Banner" was performed by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office Quartet.

Members of the Lions Club, Elks, VFW and American Legion in Brunswick County were on the N.C. 130 overpass in Shallotte to wave flags and banners and read the names of the 2,996 people who died in the attacks.

Bob Gustavson, president of the Fire Department of New York Carolinas Retirees Association and other members of the organization joined at BCC's Victory Gardens in front of the Gallery of Heroes for a Sept. 11 memorial ceremony honoring their fellow firefighters, who they called "fallen heroes," and the victims of the attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pa.

"Today we assemble here at this memorial to remember those who died on this tragic day 13 years ago," retired New York firefighter Michael Healy said. "But we especially remember the 343 comrades from the FDNY who made the supreme sacrifice on that September morning."

Gustavson thanked all those in attendance and BCC leaders for hosting the event for the last 11 years.

"This year's ceremony is extra special because we'll be presenting a piece of steel, recovered from ground zero, we present this to the community college," Gustavson said. "This icon serves as a remembrance to the horrific and cowardly attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. And it's also a symbol of how this country stood together as one during the days that followed."

Gustavson also recognized three current Sunset Beach Police Department officers who worked as New York City police officers on that day 13 years ago: Deputy Chief Joe Smith, Detective Brian Bartlett and Woody Dunn, now retired.

"Thank you gentlemen for your service," Gustavson said.

What was placed in front of the podium as Ingram, Adams, Gustavson and Watts.

A piece of steel from the World Trade Center that was recovered during the aftermath of that day 13 years ago was strapped to a dolly in front of the podium where guests spoke.

"We present this in loving memory 343 comrades who gave their all on Sept. 11 and the other 111 members who have since died of injuries and diseases related to the Sept. 11 attacks," Gustavson said as he presented the piece of steel to Adams. "All that see it will remember the oath to never forget."

"This symbol of sacrifice will be available to all at no cost ... for those who might come here to remember, to reflect, to heal," Adams said. "It's awesome and somewhat horrifying to view this artifact, 123 pounds of impact steel, part of 200,000 tons of steel that buttressed the World Trade Center. In another time, it could be another piece of abstract art. Yet this artifact catches our breath and squeezes our hearts."

Adams borrowed the words of Joseph C. Daniels, president and chief executive of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in

New York City: “At the end of the day, we want to make sure that our children’s children’s children know what this country went through on 911 and equally as important know that we came together to help one another with absolutely limitless compassion.”

As the program came to an end, nearly everyone in attendance walked past the piece of steel, but not before pausing just in front of it and gently placing their hands on it before walking away. Some smiled, others pulled out their mobile phones and snapped several photographs while others, like Teresa Regan, cried. Regan lost her husband, Don, a New York City firefighter on Sept. 11, 2001. She also was at last year’s memorial ceremony at BCC.

The day’s observances began with an 8 a.m. memorial Mass at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in North Myrtle Beach, S.C.

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