

**2012 TRIBUTE TO THE SACRIFICES MADE ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001  
NEW YORK COUNTY SUPREME COURT, CRIMINAL TERM  
Tuesday, September 11, 2012**

**Chief Administrative Judge A. Gail Prudenti:** Friends and honored guests, on behalf of Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, who will be speaking from Albany shortly, and the entire New York State Unified Court System, I want to thank you for joining us here today for this very special tribute.

Over the years, I have been asked to speak at many events, all around the state, but I can truly say that no event has ever touched me like this one today.

I am so deeply honored, privileged, and moved to be here, in the company of the families of our fallen heroes – Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Mitchell Wallace and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens. I feel proud to even speak their names, and to know that these treasured members of our court family represent all that is great about our court system, and our nation.

So often in speaking about the incomprehensible tragedy of September 11, 2001, we say that it has changed us all profoundly. And it most certainly has. It has changed us as people and it has changed our world. The horrific images from that day remain forever etched in our minds. And whether going to the airport or gazing at the New York Skyline—we see its impact all around us as a constant reminder. But for the families here today and countless others, it changed them on another level – their loved ones made the ultimate

sacrifice, and though time passes, the hurt remains and the emptiness is never quite filled.

No amount of thanks in the world will ever be enough to adequately acknowledge this sacrifice, but from the very bottom of our hearts, we thank you. And we want you to know that you and your loved ones will always be cherished members of our court family.

President John F. Kennedy once stated: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." The daily work of each and every one of our court officers around the state carries on the tradition and upholds the values that these three heroes gave their lives for.

We witnessed this all too recently in February, when the courageous actions of our court officers stopped a man opening fire in the lobby of Middletown City Court and prevented a full-scale tragedy. Just like all of the officers, policemen and firefighters on September 11<sup>th</sup>, their commitment to protect and serve was unwavering, and their selfless reactions instinctive. The bravery of these officers and countless others typifies the security ranks within our system, and I want to personally thank each and every one of them for putting their lives on the line to enable us to live and work in a safe and secure environment.

The professionalism and selflessness you exhibit each day is the best tribute to our fallen officers. I know that Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace

and Sergeant Jurgens would be proud of you, just as we will forever be proud of them.

September 11<sup>th</sup> is a constant reminder not only of the strength and resiliency of the human spirit, but also of the enduring need for justice. When the police officers, firefighters and our very own court officers ran into the buildings that day, they intended to save lives, but they wound up saving far more than that – they saved our way of life and our freedoms. The strength of our justice system, and our commitment to the rule of law are triumphant reminders of what they, and so many others, gave their lives for on that fateful day.

To the family members of our lost officers, we are so grateful that you are here today to remember with us. To all the other members of our court family – fellow judges, colleagues, attorneys, and staff—thank you for keeping the memories of those we lost alive by upholding the spirit of service in all that you do. Because of your dedication day in and day out, our courts remain powerful and visible symbols of America’s freedom and our unwavering commitment to law, justice and equality.

We will never forget the sacrifice made by Mitch, Harry and Tommy, and in remembering, we strengthen our resolve that these loved ones shall not have died in vain. As it states on one memorial, “May their strength and enduring spirit inspire us always.”

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**2012 TRIBUTE TO THE SACRIFICES MADE ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001  
ALBANY COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
Tuesday, September 11, 2012**

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** Good afternoon and welcome to our exquisite renovated courthouse here in Albany, New York, the capital of our great state.

Those of you who are with us today physically present in Albany, please just take a look around and reflect upon the extraordinary work that's been done in renovating this building. It is a reflection of the justice we serve to all of New Yorkers.

Today's tribute ceremony is about sacrifice and about justice. Our program is being webcast system-wide and we are welcoming today all the members of our court family from across the State of New York.

We gather to pay tribute to the sacrifices made on September 11<sup>th</sup> and to salute the heroes among our court family. Please stand for the presentation of colors by the honor guard.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** Please remain standing as Chief Jeannette Jordan and the students of the Watervliet Elementary School lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Chief Jeannette Jordan:** 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.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** On behalf of the Chief Judge of the State of New York Honorable Jonathan Lippman, who joins us here today and Chief Administrative Judge Gail Prudenti who joins us in New York City, I welcome you this afternoon.

I especially welcome the families of Sergeant Mitchell Wallace, Captain Harry Thompson and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens who are joining us from our 111 Centre Street Courthouse in New York City.

And I warmly welcome the judges of the Court of Appeals, the Appellate Division Third Department, our trial judges, our Administrative Judge George Ceresia and our non-judicial personnel from across the state. In addition, Mayor Jerry Jennings is with us today. Thank you, Mayor, for joining us on this special occasion. And now please join me as we welcome our own Candace Elliott who will lead us in the national anthem.

**Ms. Candace Elliott:** 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; o say does that star-spangled banner yet wave, o'er the land of the  
free and the home of the brave.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** Like many of you the tragic events of 9/11 are never far from my memory. In fact, as I enter my courthouse in Ulster County in Kingston, New York each morning I look up at the portraits of Mitchell Wallace, Tommy Jurgens and Harry Thompson. Actually this portrait hangs in the entrance to my courthouse as it hangs in every courthouse here in New York State.

They greet me each morning and I express to them my appreciation for the ultimate sacrifice as they crossed the threshold to a building dedicated to justice. Among the court officers who risked their lives to save others as the World Trade Center was attacked was Lieutenant Al Moscola. Today he is here to share with us a remembrance of 9/11.

**Lieutenant Al Moscola:** I would like to thank everyone for allowing me to share my thoughts and feelings on this day of remembrance. We come together to remember those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. We look for solace and meaning from the events of that horrific day.

Like many of you, I remember the day as if it were yesterday. On September 11, 2001, I was an instructor at the New York State Court Officers Academy in Lower Manhattan. As some of you may know, fellow academy instructors, Joe Baccellieri, Andrew Wender and I arrived at the North Tower to help shortly after the plane crashed into the building as our academy was only a few short blocks away.

We had heard the crash and looked to see the gaping hole in the North Tower from the recruits' locker room. I believe we were some of the

very first uniformed officers to arrive on scene.

When we arrived, there was no doubt that this was a large plane. You could see luggage and people's clothing as well as airplane parts scattered across the outdoor concourse.

When we entered the building, it was mass chaos people were running by us in an effort to exit the tower. As we walked through the main lobby, I remember, walking through puddles of oil and water, we later found out that that oil was actually jet fuel that had washed down from the elevator shafts.

I remember hearing a banging sound and looked over at the bank of elevators to the left and the elevators were all crooked and the doors were cocked to one side, and I remember thinking how am I going to get the people out of the elevators? I don't have the equipment to open those doors.

As I headed over to help, just like that, a bell rang out, a light came on and the doors opened. The people were shocked at first and hesitant but then it came upon them and they ran out.

Others running from the building advised us that people were trapped in the upper floors. So Andrew, Joe and I, without too much of a conversation, headed towards the stairs. As we climbed up the stairwell passing hundreds of people they blessed and thanked us for helping. It seemed the higher we climbed, each person was more thankful than the one before.

We helped to evacuate as many people as we could and cleared

each floor as we climbed. It was reported by people we had passed that the plane had actually crashed up around the 86<sup>th</sup> floor and that's where we attempted to reach. But we had reached as far as the 51<sup>st</sup> floor before the building violently shook, twisted and threw us back down the stairs. We later learned that that was actually the collapse of the South Tower.

At that point our radios cried out with calls of Mayday at 10:13. We heard calls for assistance from other fellow academy instructors as well as members of other agencies.

Unable to continue our ascent, Joe, Andrew and I worked our way down from the North Tower finally reaching the main floor. Once there it seemed as though the world had ended. There were no remnants of what we had seen when we first entered the tower, it had been replaced by complete and utter destruction. There were no walls, no windows, no furniture, there was nothing.

I remember thinking if there is a hell this is clearly what it must look like. I saw a police car in the distance; it was upside down and on fire. Fire engines and other emergency vehicles were scattered about the landscape and seemed to be thrown around like children's toys.

We continued to assist other rescue personnel in the lobby until we were told that the South Tower had fallen and that we needed to get out, it was believed that our tower would fall next.

We gathered with other rescue personnel and attempted to exit the building. It was difficult at first as we witnessed the unimaginable decision people in the tower were forced to make to escape the flames. So we

gathered single file and serpentine across the outdoor concourse hoping to reach our destination. Sadly some of us did not.

We barely cleared the front of the building reaching the street before we heard the tower start to collapse upon itself in a thunderous roar. I remember looking up watching the building fall onto itself floor by floor as the cloud of debris extended outward consuming the sky.

We ran as fast as we could, assisting others in the direction we had chosen. I remember people running in all directions. We were all trying to avoid the inevitable.

I remember thinking to myself how am I going to outrun a falling building? How am I going to do this? Andrew and I lost Joe in the confusion. Exhausted, we took cover near a wooden fence and park bench.

Like a freight train, we could hear the building closing in on us. So huddled together the remnants of the building washed over us and we became enveloped in the debris. Everything went black around us. It was as if we had been pulled into another dimension. The daylight disappeared into a pinhole. You would think that it would just sort of shower us and go dark, but no, it just went like a pinhole and then just like that it was gone.

Unable to breathe and fighting for air, I pulled up my t-shirt from my uniform to try to use it as a filter but there was no air to breathe. I began to think about my loved ones, how I would miss them and how I would never be able to tell them how much I cared and loved them again. I

wondered what their lives would be like without me.

After a short while my ears started to ring, I stopped fighting; I became relaxed, somewhat peaceful. As I thought about giving in, I heard a voice that yelled out, "If you can hear me follow my voice, come to me." Andrew and I pushed past the debris to the voice and we were pulled into a coffee shop.

From the darkness and once again in the light of day we gasped for air. We immediately began to vomit, pushing up the debris that had blocked our airways. I remember being able to take my first breath. It was as if I had been reborn and by the grace of God we had been spared.

Having been truly blessed I stand before you today as we come together each year to remember and to honor the brave men and women that went far beyond comprehension. It's been said let there be no doubt the terrific acts of a few were greatly surpassed by the heroic acts of many on September 11, 2001. Three of our own, Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Tommy Jurgens and Sergeant Mitch Wallace are among those.

I have been blessed to have had them as a part of my life. I've known Harry since 1996 when I was first assigned to 111 Centre Street and later we worked together at the Court Officers Academy.

Harry was a role model, an inspiration in all aspects of life. One of his beliefs that remains a fixture in my home is "We must strive to enjoy the journey of life rather than concentrating on the destination." I miss Harry's infectious smile and his deep laugh. Harry was truly one of the

kindest people I've ever met.

I have also had the great fortune to befriend Tommy Jurgens. Tommy took over my position on perimeter patrol when I left 111 and took my position at the Court Officers Academy. I'm not sure there was a time that I didn't see Tommy with a smile on his face and compassion in his heart. Simply put, Tommy was just an all-around great guy always willing to give it his all.

Mitch Wallace was in one of the very first recruit classes that I had the opportunity to work with as a newly qualified academy instructor. Mitch was a great recruit and possessed the qualities that exemplified what we want our officers to become. When I had heard that Mitch was to receive an award for helping save someone's life on a Long Island Railroad, I wasn't surprised.

The Bible states "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." These three extraordinary gentlemen gave their lives that day to help save others.

I often wonder if they are with us in our daily lives or just stopped by and say hello. Perhaps they were here with us today. I would like to share with you a thought that someone once shared with me.

Let's say you go into a room and you turn the light switch on, but the light doesn't come on. Our immediate thought is that the light bulb has blown or perhaps the switch is broken. The one thing we immediately dismiss is the flow of electricity. Is it because we are unable to see or touch electricity? We certainly know it exists. But because we cannot see

or touch electricity we dismiss it at first as the cause of the problem and try the switch again or perhaps even change the bulb.

I share this with you so we may stop for a moment and think about the loved ones we have lost. Much like the electricity, could it be they are right here with us but we are unable to see or touch them? It would be wonderful to know that Harry, Mitch and Tom are here with us today and enjoy the fact that we come together each year to celebrate their lives and pay tribute to their accomplishments.

So with that in mind, Harry, Mitch and Tommy, and to all of our loved ones departed, watch over us, keep us safe and wait for us as I am confident we shall meet again.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** And now joining us from New York City is the Honorable Fern Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge who will introduce the officers' families.

**Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fern Fisher:** They join us every year because love endures. The two sons of Captain Thompson were here earlier today, they were unable to stay for this ceremony but I must mention them. They've grown to be such wonderful young men, Michael Thompson and Rashon Thompson.

From the Wallace family, Ken Wallace, Mitch's father, Rita Wallace, Mitch's mother, Bruce Wallace, his uncle, Jeremy Wallace, the son of Bruce, Noreen McDonough his fiancée and her sister who's always with her, Maureen McDonough.

And from the Jurgen's family, Robert Blakeman, his grandfather, Linda Proper his mother, Bradley Jurgens, his brother, Joseph Jurgens, Tommy's father, Barbara Jurgens, John and Kylie Jurgens, Jim and Catherine Jurgens, Bruce Blakeman, his uncle and Jessica Jurgens his sister.

Thank you so much for having the heart to be with us every year and you know that we send our love to you as much as we can, not just today but every day.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** Today as I mentioned we pay tribute. We also reaffirm our spirit of service and we commit ourselves to treat every single person that appears in our courts, whether they are parties or jurors, or attorneys or witnesses or just a person that came in to file a paper or ask a question, we reaffirm our commitment to treat each individual with dignity and respect and integrity and kindness.

And we reaffirm our tradition of service and the need to expand access to justice to all individuals in New York State so that we can deliver equal justice to each and every person that seeks redress in our courts. Please join me in welcoming David Schraver, President-Elect of the New York State Bar Association.

**President-Elect of the New York State Bar Association David Schraver:** Thank you Justice Peters and thank you for inviting me to be here today.

Chief Judge Lippman, Presiding Justice Peters, honorable judges, honored guests and family members. Every year on 9/11 we are reminded of the terrible attacks of that day and of the individuals whose lives were lost. It is an honor to join you today in recognizing those individuals who responded to the attacks of 9/11 and remembering particularly the court officers who risked their lives that day and the three who lost their lives; Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Mitchell Wallace and Sergeant Tommy Jurgens as they demonstrated on 9/11 that their bravery, selflessness and instinct to serve and protect others were not limited to the courtroom.

We know that the courthouse can be a very stressful place. It can be a crucible where people accused of a crime are tried and judged, where contentious civil disputes play out, where rights are determined and where decisions are made that will affect the lives of individuals, and indeed, the course of our society.

Without order in our courthouses there would be no order in our society. Those of us who spend time in court whether as attorneys, litigants, witnesses or jurors can take our safety for granted because of the dedicated men and women who protect our courthouses every day.

As we saw in Middletown earlier this year the bravery, courage and quick action of court officers is critical to court safety and to the proper functioning of our justice system.

Our courts, as the third branch of our democratic government, uphold the rule of law and preserve a government worthy of our

allegiance, a government with liberty and justice for all. Court officers play a critical role in protecting our courts, our freedoms and our democratic way of life.

On behalf of the New York State Bar Association, I am pleased to join you in remembering and honoring the court officers who lost their lives on 9/11 and in recognizing and thanking those who work every day to keep our courts safe.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** I noticed Chief Jordan in the hallway. If there are court officers out there that would like to see this proceeding despite the fact that our courtroom is absolutely overflowing, maybe they can spend some time right over here and be with us. Please invite them in. We are honoring you today. It just doesn't seem fair for you to be in the hallway.

And I would like to thank all of you for coming. It is an overflow crowd and a very important day to pay tribute, and I appreciate all of you taking the time to visit us.

It is incumbent upon us today especially today to honor our heroes. It should come as no surprise to each and every one of you here today that there are brave women and brave men who comprise our court personnel. Their acts of selflessness are no stranger to our court system. And to talk about those acts of selflessness, I'd like to introduce Honorable Michael Coccoma, the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge.

**Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Michael Cocco:** Thank you Justice Peters, honored guests. This ceremony of remembrance and many like it across this country provide a time for reflection on the devastating loss of life that day. Hundreds of public servants and ordinary people lost their lives engaged in extraordinary acts of heroism.

Our New York judicial family suffered the loss of three court officers, Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Thomas Jurgens and Sergeant Mitchell Wallace.

Faced with a high risk of death or injury to themselves, they exhibited true bravery in their actions, giving their last full measure of devotion to protect and to serve. The same devotion to service continues day to day in our courts by our court officers who have exhibited extraordinary devotion to serving the public.

Although their actions did not result in the supreme sacrifice made by court officers Thompson, Jurgens and Wallace, it is fitting that these heroic employees be recognized also as part of today's ceremony.

**July 26, 2011**

In Buffalo, New York while off duty, Captain Thomas Ciesla and Court Officer Erich Nikischer heroically entered a burning building multiple times without hesitation for their own safety to rescue elderly residents from death or serious injury.

**August 29, 2012**

While off duty and travelling in the State of Pennsylvania, Court Officer Thomas Spataro came to the assistance of a Pennsylvania State

Trooper who was being assaulted by a violent individual on the side of a Pennsylvania highway. Officer Spataro crossed the highway on foot, approached the scene of the assault, identified himself as a police officer, helped subdue the assailant and assisted with handcuffing and detaining the suspect until additional law enforcement arrived.

**August 23, 2012**

In the Bronx, New York, Supreme Court Officers Wascar Herrera Raymond Mercado, Katherine Dalton and Steve Snyder together with Sergeant Paul Tamaro and Vincent Aliis during their lunch hour assisted in capturing and arresting a man responsible for shooting two people on the street.

**February 8, 2012**

In Middletown, New York in the City Court Sergeant Robert Kowal together with Court Officers Scott Truex, Michele Lynch and Michael Mathisen returned fire at an armed man who fired two rounds at their magnetometer post. At the same time these officers took swift action to protect and save the lives of a number of court personnel and the public engaged in court proceedings in City Court.

**December 11, 2011**

While off duty, Captain Kevin Brophy of the Suffolk County Command came to the assistance of a Long Island Railroad conductor who was being assaulted by three individuals at the Freeport train station. He wrestled one individual, subdued him and called 911, turning the individual over to the police upon arrival.

In addition to these heroic acts, we also wish to recognize today the following members of our court family for their exemplary performance of duty by exhibiting skills taught to them at the academy in which their quick actions in responding had meant the difference between life and death.

**September 15, 2011**

Court Officer Robert Keane of the Kings County Criminal Court quickly responded to reports of an unresponsive court reporter at his facility. His actions in administering CPR contributed to the employee's survival and eventual return to work.

**June 28, 2011**

Likewise in Buffalo, New York, Court Officer Mike Norton assisted by Court Officers Don Holler and Paul Doxbeck administered CPR and used an AED upon discovery by Sergeant James Schrier of an unresponsive man without a pulse at their facility. Their quick action and use of their training saved this man's life.

Again in the exemplary performance of duty, careful and thoughtful attention paid to circumstances and their surroundings enabled our court officers to avert possible devastating outcomes for small children in two situations.

**July 12, 2012**

In Dutchess County, New York, Court Officers Al'Lear Redman Hogg and Raymond Diaz together with Sergeant Craig Narod acting on a "sixth sense" when observing a young boy on the street struggling with an adult

male, intervened, and upon questioning, determined they had prevented an abduction of the child by a stranger.

**March 27, 2012**

In Nassau County, New York while on courthouse perimeter patrol having received a law enforcement report to be on the lookout for a missing developmentally disabled child, Court Officers Mark Pullo and Joan Pearsall located the child returning him to the Nassau Police.

And finally court employees this past year displayed a dedication to the public that was extraordinary. Last September, flooding from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee devastated many of our upstate counties causing severe damage to homes and businesses in Schoharie, Tioga and Orange counties to our court facilities.

Disregarding their own property loss, many of our court personnel worked tirelessly seven days a week in knee-deep mud and water to open temporary facilities for a court so that their communities could have a venue for access to justice during the months of rehabilitation of the court facilities.

What the attackers on 9/11 could never destroy is the dedication to service to others that so many displayed during the events of that day. That same dedication to public service shown by Captain Thompson, Sergeant Jurgens and Sergeant Wallace has continued over the years as demonstrated by the actions of those mentioned in these remarks.

Captain Thompson, Sergeant Jurgens and Sergeant Wallace set a standard by which we all will be measured, for their sacrifice we are

forever thankful. It is also my honor today to recognize and to express our appreciation and gratitude to those in the family of the New York State Unified Court System who continue to follow in their footsteps.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** Our final speaker is the man who steers our ship of justice. We are grateful daily for his strength and his guidance. Ladies and gentleman, the Honorable Jonathan Lippman, Chief Judge.

**Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman:** Thank you Presiding Justice Peters for hosting this year's event and for your leadership of this wonderful Third Department and I'm so glad to be here with all of you the members of our court, the Appellate Division, the trial judges, Mayor Jennings, the county executives and all of you in the court family.

It is now 11 years since September 11, 2001, and none of us can ever forget. While new thoughts and feelings may occupy the forefront of our minds, we cannot forget that bright, clear day and the vivid images of passenger jets slicing into the World Trade Center. To this day the memories are chilling and are literally frozen in time.

We cannot forget the startling realization that this was not an accident. We cannot forget the sacrifices made by so many that morning and the loss of loved ones, friends or family, and we cannot forget the deep grief we suffered and continue to suffer. And none of us in the court system, each in our own way, can ever forget the loss of three giants of

our own court family.

We cannot ever forget that Captain William Harry Thompson, Sergeant Mitchell Wallace and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens made the ultimate sacrifice that day in the ashes of the World Trade Center. They are shining examples of bravery and strength in the face of terror and danger.

I guess I appreciate that even more as I had the privilege in the days immediately after 9/11 to go under what was left of the World Trade Center, and the ashes and the rubble to check on the progress of the search that was going on for our fallen officers.

It was a scene that I certainly could never forget, that etched on the pillars of what was left of the Trade Center was the last date and time that the particular person they were looking for had last been seen. And it was the hope at that time that maybe some of the air pockets that existed under there were where our people might still be alive. But as we know that was not meant to be, and our eyes moisten when we think of our lost officers and what they went through on that day.

Their bravery and sacrifice is indelibly etched in our minds. Make no mistake; we cannot forget that we are all one with their families so many of whom are in New York City today with Judge Prudenti and Judge Fisher and the families of all the Americans who died that day. We are all together and today we all pause to remember.

On 9/11 we witnessed both the very worst and the very best that human nature has to offer. The pain and death inflicted by hatred and the

incredible heroism, compassion and unity of which we are capable as people.

Last year the long-awaited 9/11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan opened to visitors. The memorial's twin pools in the footprint of the towers stand as a reminder of the horrific events of that day and even more as a reminder of our resilience. The names of the victims etched in brass around the pools conjure up that dark time when the names and faces of the missing looked out at us from sheets of papers curling all fences and buildings all over New York City.

The nearly 3,000 names on the brass parapets include 1,470 in the North Tower, 695 in the South Tower, 246 in the four hijacked planes, 125 in the Pentagon, 441 first responders and 6 who were killed in the February 1993 car bomb explosion in the garage underneath the World Trade Center. They were from 90 countries and ranged in age from 2 to 85 years old. The memorial provides a lasting tribute to their sacrifice and a permanent spot for contemplation, mourning and remembrance.

And we in the courts have it in our power to create an ongoing memorial of service to others. The courts have such a central role in delivering justice to our people and maintaining the social fabric of our communities.

Our endurance in the chaos of those early days after the terrorist attacks reminded us all of the critical role we play in preserving the values that make our country so unique, equal justice, due process and the rule of law. We have a new appreciation for the importance of these

fundamental principles following the transforming events of September 11, 2001.

I am deeply proud of our court family and how they reacted to the despicable and cowardly terrorist acts of that day. Not only our fallen heroes, Harry, Mitch and Tommy, and the officers who were there shoulder to shoulder with them, but all of our court staff in so many court facilities around this great state. Their willingness to do everything that was asked of them and more meant that our courts could reopen within days of the event and continue operating under extremely difficult conditions in the days and weeks following the attacks.

For a court system of this magnitude that handles thousands and thousands of criminal and civil cases every day it was crucial that justice continued to be served.

Justice, it's what we're all about. Ensuring justice and due process for all must be our commitment today and every day, whether we are judges, court officers, court clerks, attorneys or any of us working as part of the justice system.

The rule of law and our commitment to fair and equal justice for rich and poor, high and low alike is fundamentally what separates us from those who on September 11, 2001 sought to destroy everything we stand for. These principles and values represent not only our belief in the American system of government but also our faith in humanity and very basic human goodness.

The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> were an expression of hatred for us

and our way of life. They challenged our openness, our freedom and again the rule of law that is so fundamental to our society and our lives.

Our best tribute to the sacrifices made by so many 11 years ago is to confirm our dedication to those principles and to our democratic institutions. Let that be our solemn pledge so that all those who perished that day will not die in vain.

**Appellate Division Judge Karen Peters:** On September 11<sup>th</sup> through one of the darkest moments in our nation's history 2,974 innocent people lost their lives. 343 of those people were New York City Firefighters, 37 were Port Authority Police Officers, 23 were New York City Police Officers, 8 were EMS workers and 3, Captain Thompson, Sergeant Wallace and Sergeant Jurgens, who are right over here, were members of our court family.

As we close our program with the New York State Pipes and Drums, I again want to recognize the members of the families of our fallen officers and I want to thank them for joining us today and allowing us in Albany to participate in honoring the heroes of our court system.

We are grateful for their service and we are grateful for the service of all the court officers who protect us each and every day. Thank you.