

2011 TRIBUTE TO THE SACRIFICES MADE ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
NEW YORK COUNTY SUPREME COURT, CIVIL TERM, ROTUNDA

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fern Fisher: Good afternoon and welcome to 60 Centre Street and this wonderful rotunda. Please look up for those of you who have never been here before and see a reflection of justice. And today's ceremony is a little bit about justice and the American way of life. Today is a tribute to the sacrifices made on September 11, 2001, and it is so hard to believe it is ten years ago. Please stand for the presentation of the colors by the New York State Court Ceremonial Unit and the New York State Courts Pipes and Drums, the best in the State.

Chief of Public Safety Jewel Williams: 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.

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fisher: Please be seated. On behalf of the Chief Judge of the State of New York the Honorable Judge Lippman and the Chief Administrative Judge Ann Pfau, I welcome you this morning. I welcome the families of Mitch, Tommy and Harry. I welcome all the judges, the non-judicial personnel and other members of the audience as we remember what happened ten years ago.

It is my job to be the mistress of ceremony today but I think you will hear from all of us our different thoughts, let me introduce you first to the wonderful, the beautiful Michelle Perry-Belches our songstress. Who has been singing either God bless America or our National Anthem at these ceremonies. And we ask her for a good reason because she always brings it home to the heart.

Retired Major Reginald Mebane who was the commanding officer of the New York County Supreme Court, Criminal Term, during the 9/11 attack, the Chief of Public Safety Chief Jewel Williams, Honorable Norman Goodman, Clerk of New York County, and our guest today from the Federal Courts the Honorable Loretta Preska, the Chief Judge of this district.

The honorable, the wonderful and always part of our family, the Honorable Judith S. Kaye former Chief Judge of the State of New York and the woman in charge of this building, in charge of New York County Supreme Court Civil Term the Honorable Sherry Klein-Heitler. And left for last but not because he's the least but because he makes this all happen. A man that is so dedicated to justice his name is being talked about throughout this country, the Honorable Jonathan Lippman. And because apparently my high heels are not high enough and I can't see, I overlooked the Honorable Luis Gonzalez the presiding Justice for the First Department Appellate Division. To bring the welcoming remarks, the Honorable Sherry Klein Heitler.

Administrative Judge for Civil Matters Sherry Klein-Heitler: Judge Lippman and all honored guests. And you really are all honored guests here today. Welcome to 60 Centre Street as we remember the tragedy of 9/11 which took place ten years ago.

A day in which an act was designed to kill and to terrorize but was also designed to crush our spirit and crush our rule of law. And that's why it's so fitting ladies and gentlemen that we're gathered in a courthouse where everyday we consider the law, to proclaim that 9/11, the day that changed the world, made us tougher and more resolute, to pursue the principles that we really all so strongly believe in.

Thank you all for being here today and sharing with us this program which talks about memories. Because as it has been said many times: a memory is a way of holding on to things, things that you love, things that you are and things that you don't want to lose. So once again welcome to our home of law where we will all always be grateful for the sacrifices that were made on our behalf and of course where we will never ever forget.

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fisher: Thank you Judge Heitler. Each of us, if we close our eyes, will remember where we were at the minute that first plane hit, we will never forget. I can never forget although I was not in the city of New York. I was in Albany at a conference with Chief Judge Kaye and the then Chief Administrative Judge Jonathan Lippman for an access to justice conference.

And I clearly remember while, I was sipping my coffee, when the first plane hit and thinking it had to be one of those little small planes and some pilot that didn't know what he was doing. But after the second plane hit, we all ran to the phones because we knew that

something serious was happening in this country. I ran to the phone to call my court because we were concerned that something was also happening in the court.

And throughout that morning and that afternoon sitting with Judge Lippman and Judge Kaye and sitting very close to Judge Judith Harris Kluger kind of holding hands and being in shock. We were not prepared to learn the rest of what had happened. We knew that the World Trade Center had fallen, we knew that the Court of Claims, court which was located in the complex, was destroyed but we did not know right away that three of our officers were missing.

Too soon we found out that Captain Harry Thompson, Sergeant Mitchel Wallace and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens were missing. That they were in the tower at the time it collapsed. Just hours hoping that they would be found and we know that they were not found alive. They were found in the rubble and all three of them perished. No greater sacrifice was made than the sacrifices that were made by those three officers and the other first responders that perished, because they went willingly to help.

And today we remember Captain Harry Thompson, the ultimate professional court officer. That's what everybody said about Harry, spit and polish and right by the rules. And for those judges who had him—in their court rooms—that's what they'll tell you about Harry, and that's what the people in the academy will tell you about Harry. But he also had a great smile which is still reflected in his son's face.

Sergeant Mitchel Wallace, soon to be married, an EMT, had shown other hints of heroism before that day. But on that day, I learned today and I asked if I could mention this, apparently right before he perished Mitch triaged a woman named Mary Jos. He administered help to her, got her into the ambulance, but if not for that act she tells me, she does not believe that she would be here today. And she's joined us today to remember Mitch and who he was.

Sergeant Thomas Jurgens, bright smile, young, enthusiastic, happy to be a court officer, not with us too long, but on that day he was the ultimate court officer. He rushed to the World Trade Center to help with the more seasoned court officers and his family—they've always told me how special Tommy always was, he was always a special child and on 9/11 he showed us how special he was.

And we remember all of the victims of the World Trade Center disaster, but this family and this family includes the families of our three court officers because we're one family. Today we especially remember Harry, Mitch and Tommy. This week I was in Haiti bringing donated shoes to women who were subject to sexual violence there. The poverty and devastation from the earthquake and the hopelessness is overwhelming and extremely depressing. I returned at 2:00 this morning, and when I hit home I realized how lucky I am to be an American. That I live in a country where the government is not corrupt and is responsive to its people.

On 9/11 2001, the terrorists tried to destroy who we are. To take away our American dream, but they didn't succeed in doing so. Now we all know that today there are terrorist warnings and when I got up this morning my very sleepy daughter said to me: "mom, you're not going to work are you? It's dangerous." I said I have a job to do and my job is to make sure that justice prevails. And it's our job to make sure that who we are as Americans will always be. And our job is to remember every single year what happened on September 11, 2001. Our job is to remember the sacrifices that were made that day—the sacrifices in particular that Harry, Mitch and Thomas made.

But every day we have to remember how important it is that we hold on to our freedoms and that we do what it takes to protect what makes America. My job now is to introduce Chief Jewel Williams. Who will introduce the court officers' families and acknowledge all of the first responders.

Chief Williams: Thank you, judge. It is my honor to introduce the families of the three fallen heroes: Captain Harry Thompson, Sergeant Tommy Jurgens and Sergeant Mitchel Wallace, who are with us today. Now I'm going to ask the family members to please stand.

Joe and Barbara Jurgens, John and Kylie Jurgens, Jim Jurgens, Joe and Stephanie Jurgens, Jessica Jurgens, Bradley Jurgens, Linda Proper, Bradley Blakeman, Robert Blakeman and Bruce Blakeman.

The Thompson family, we have Rashon Williams, please stand. Michael couldn't make it this morning he was here today for an earlier ceremony.

The Wallace family: we have Ken Wallace, Bruce Wallace, Rita Wallace, Robert Schneider, Michelle Miller and her family, Robert Star, Noreen McDunner, Maureen McDunner and a few friends. One person I would like to stand and I would like all of us to acknowledge is the woman that Judge Fisher mentioned earlier that Mitch triaged at the World Trade Center's site on that day and that's Mary Jos. And would you all please give them all a round of applause. Thank you very much family.

America's first line of defense in any terrorist attack is the first responder community, for example our court officers, local police, fire fighters and emergency medical professionals. Properly trained and equipped, first responders have the greatest potential to save lives and limit casualties after a terrorist attack.

Harry, Tommy and Mitch, along with scores of other court officers, responded to the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 putting themselves in harm's way. We will always have a special place in our hearts for them for they are our heroes.

Among the court officers who risked their lives to save others at the World Trade Center were—and some of them are here with us today and some could not make it. If you are here with us today please stand —so we can acknowledge you.

Chief of Training Joseph Baccellieri Jr., Sergeant Tyree Bacon, Sergeant Francis Barry, Captain John Civelia now retired, Senior Court Clerk Gerard Davis, Officer William Faulkner retired, Associate Appellate Court Clerk Gerard Grant, Lieutenant Edwin Kennedy, Officer Elayne Kittel, Officer William Kuhrt retired, Lieutenant Theodore Leoutsakos retired, Sergeant Craig Lovrich, Captain Patricia Mack retired, Major Reginald Mebane retired, Lieutenant Al Moscola, Lieutenant Katherine Negrón-McCabe, Officer Joseph Ranauro, Captain Albert Rominelli, Captain Richard Rosenfeld—Senior Court Clerk Andrew Scagnelli, Officer Mahindra Seobarrat, who is now at the Federal Protective Service, and Captain Andrew Wender.

There were hundreds of court officers who worked on the recovery effort at ground zero. It is in their honor we maintain this proud tradition of valor, duty and commitment. At this time I would like to introduce the former Commanding Officer of the New York Supreme Criminal Term Major Reginald Mebane.

Major Reginald Mebane, Commanding Officer, New York County Supreme Court, Criminal Branch (Ret.): Thank you Chief Williams. First I'd like to acknowledge Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Chief Judge Judith Kaye, all the Deputy Chief Administrative Judges and Judiciary that are present, Chief Williams and her staff.

Someone once said that brevity is wit. I'm not going to be before you long because what you have heard by Judge Fisher is the same thing that I would say. But first I would like to say this: we are here to remember, acknowledge ten years, a decade ago, the loss of three fine heroic men. It seems like yesterday to me. We often take for granted each day that we will return home once we've completed our activities, not so. I'm a former marine and our motto is *Semper Fidelis*, Always Faithful, and that's what I think of when I think of those three men.

To the Wallace family, I remember Mitch, his first day with us he was full of questions, constantly talking. I knew I could count on him though in the time of emergency. To the Jurgens family, we called him Tommy the kid, just married. His experience is what I would come to rely upon. And to the Thompson family, Harry was like a younger brother to me, for several years we changed side by side in the same locker room. And during those mornings that we would come in to prepare for our work, Harry was in front of his locker, I in front of mine, spit shining our shoes, making sure the uniform was right. The one thing that we could not tolerate was a gray shirt. He was like a younger brother to me.

It is said that time heals wounds, but they neglected to tell you the scars are left. I now carry three scars, Mitchel Wallace, Tommy Jurgens and Harry Thompson in my heart. They're gone but not forgotten.

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fisher: Thank you Major Mebane. It was leadership like Major Mebane's that got us through the days after 9/11. And at the very top was Chief Judge Kaye and the then Chief Administrative Judge, Jonathan Lippman, steadying the ship making sure that the course would remain open, giving us the strength as Administrative Judges and Chief Clerks to remain strong despite the job that we had to do.

At the time, Judge Lippman was the Chief Administrative Judge and he is now the Chief Judge and what he showed during those days is what he's showing now as the Chief

Judge: a strong commitment to justice. And so it's my pleasure to introduce you to the Chief Judge, the Honorable Jonathan Lippman.

Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman: Thank you Fern. It's a delight to see all of you today. Reggie, I'm so glad that you are here we couldn't have this event without you—that's for sure.

Ten years is a long time. Much can happen in a decade. Children are born, loved ones get married. We graduate from school, find satisfaction in our work. And new thoughts and feelings occupy the forefront of our minds. But that does not mean we forget. We cannot forget what happened on September 11, 2001. We cannot forget the vivid images of passenger jets slicing into the World Trade Center. We cannot forget the chilling realization that this was not an accident. We cannot forget the sacrifices made by so many that morning. For many of us, that day meant the loss of loved ones, friends, or family; and we cannot forget the deep grief we suffered and continue to suffer.

For me personally I cannot forget walking with my predecessor, Judith Kaye, who I am so delighted is here with us today, was such a tower of strength that day and the days that followed. And I want to acknowledge her presence and say how much we appreciate her being here. On that day, we walked on the ashes under the remains of the World Trade Center in the days after 9/11, talking to the bravest and the finest who were looking desperately for our own lost heroes, believing as with so many others that they might still be alive in air pockets beneath the rubble. I cannot forget how they would mark the time and the day of each search on whatever columns and walls were still left standing so they would know when they had last searched a particular area. We wore masks to protect us from the very real danger of carbon monoxide, and I cannot forget when we left our clothes were covered with that fine soft ash that was in essence all that remained of the Twin Towers. To this day, the memories chill me . . . the memories are frozen in time.

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 Mitchel Wallace, and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens made the ultimate sacrifice that day. They are shining examples of bravery and strength in the face of terror and danger.

Our eyes moisten when we think of them, as well they should. Harry, Mitch, and Tommy are our heroes always -- their bravery and sacrifice indelibly etched in our minds. Make no mistake, we cannot forget that we are all one with their families and the families of all the Americans who died that day.

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.

I am deeply proud of our judges and court family and how they reacted to the horrific events of 9/11 -- not only our fallen heroes and the officers who were there shoulder to shoulder with them, but all of our court staff in so many court facilities within the "frozen zone" of downtown Manhattan and around this great city and state. Their willingness to do everything that was asked of them and more meant that our courts could re-open within days of September 11 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 each day, it was crucial that justice continue to be served.

Our 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.

The stability of our system of government depends heavily on a court system that is governed by laws, not fear. The attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 shook us. But we as a city, state, and nation did not give in to mistrust and fear. And as an aside on this day and this weekend, it can be certain that fear strikes out in New York City. The threats and everything that go with them only makes us stronger and the events of these ten

years prove that fact. Instead, we remember what makes us great, that no one is above the law, or beneath its notice, or unworthy of its application.

Ensuring access to justice and due process for all must always be our commitment, 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 sought to destroy everything we stand for on that horrible day of September 11, 2011. These principles and values represent not only our belief in the American System of government, but also our faith in humanity and basic human goodness.

The attacks of September 11th 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 ten years ago is to confirm our dedication to strengthening our democratic institutions and reinforcing our commitment to American values and our constitutional and moral obligation to provide equal justice to all. For all of us, that remains our mission and our pledge today and every day, because we cannot forget that Harry, Mitch and Tommy would expect nothing less from all of us. May God bless all of you, the Unified Court System of the State of New York and the United States of America.

Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fisher: In closing, I would also like to acknowledge the presence of someone who has come quite far to be with us today: the President of the New York State Bar Association Vincent Doyle Jr.

I want to thank you all for joining us in this tribute to Harry, Mitch and Tommy, particularly to Judge Preska for joining us and Judge Kaye for always joining when it counts the most. To the families who come every year to be with us on this day.

I will see you again next year and the year after that because we are always going to remember that day. And we will always in some way acknowledge the sacrifices that Harry, Tommy and Mitch made to this city. And to the families I know this is a tough day for you

but you come out and join us anyway and you don't know how much we appreciate you being here.

So see you again next year, we will continue to remember, so we never forget. Thank you so much for coming today. And in closing Michelle Perry-Belches will sing a song that I think we all look forward to hearing because it says so much about this country, America the Beautiful.