



News release

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**Gateway holds ceremony to honor
those lost in Sept. 11 terrorist attacks**

While everyone ran from the danger, they ran into it.

It's not that they didn't realize the danger or the potential outcome of their actions. They knew. And yet, they still ran on.

Gateway Technical College held a ceremony today to honor those who gave their lives in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 – to those who ran toward danger.

"Amid the chaos, while so many people were desperately trying to escape the towers and the surrounding area, our first responders were moving in the opposite direction," Gateway Technical College President and CEO Veronique Tran told the audience gathered at the college's HERO Center in Burlington for the event.

"They were running toward the danger. Police officers. Firefighters. Emergency personnel. They went toward the people who needed help. They went toward uncertainty and danger to save lives. Many lost their lives that day."

A bell was struck and a moment of silence was held during the exact times of the events of Sept. 11 to honor those who passed.

Other officials who spoke included Racine Fire Chief Steve Hansen, Lakewood Fire Chief Eric Johnson, Burlington Police Chief Brian Zmudzinski and SC

Johnson-Waxdale Fire Chief Gavin DeGrave. Gateway graduate and veteran Jaemie McDonough spoke in a prerecorded video address.

Tran echoed the words of every speaker at the event – namely, that they knew exactly what they were doing at the exact time when they heard that an airplane had crashed into the World Trade Center. Hansen was already a first responder when the attacks took place and was in the middle of his morning routine when he said firefighters at Station 8 reported that one of the towers was hit by an airplane.

“My immediate thought was this will be a heck of a firefighting operation,” said Hansen, who knew the uphill battle facing first responders that day but – like many – also initially thought that the airplane crash was nothing more than a tragic accident. He, and the rest of the world, were to soon find out that it was much, much more.

“We will always remember the sacrifices of the 343 firefighters as we also remember our own who have also made the ultimate sacrifice defending our communities against natural and man-made tragedies,” he said.

Zmudzinski said he was a young Marine at the time of the attacks and learned of them through a phone call from his father.

“All that day, infantry Marines stayed at the ready, watching the TVs in the operations center in a state of shock, lusting to get payback for New York and our country, hoping to have the opportunity to stand up and avenge the fallen,” said Zmudzinski. “The vulnerability we all felt was overwhelming. In that moment, we were all Americans, we were all victims, we were all unified in the love of this country, and, for a moment in time, we all even loved our president. Politics didn’t matter – our recovery as a nation did.”

Zmudzinski later served in the War on Terror, including in Fallujah.

“In the 20 years after September 11th, more than 7,000 American service members gave their lives in the wars that followed,” he said. “Millions more served, many deploying again and again, carrying forward a commitment to defend a nation forever changed by that September morning.

“Like so many who served during that era, I saw firsthand what service, sacrifice and commitment to something greater than ourselves meant. The lessons I carried home from that experience did not end when I took off the camouflage. They followed me into law enforcement and continue to shape the way I view leadership and service today as a police officer and police chief.”

Much of the ceremony was conducted near the monument, “On Eagle’s Wings,” a piece inspired by the heroic acts of those first responders to the World Trade Center. At its base is a steel I-beam from the World Trade Center, taken from the wreckage of the New York building complex in the aftermath of the attack on the center. This national artifact was presented to Gateway by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation of New York City to honor the dedication of the Health and Emergency Response Occupations training center and to inspire future generations of heroes.

Gateway Technical College’s mission is to deliver industry-focused education that is flexible, accessible and affordable for our diverse community. The college collaborates with communities in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth counties to ensure economic growth and viability by providing education, training, leadership and technological resources to meet the changing needs of students, employers and communities.

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