



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SEPTEMBER 11 REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY SLATED FOR STOREY SQUARE

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County and the City of Uniontown will host a remembrance ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001.

“September 11th: 20 Years Later” will take place at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 11 in Storey Square, along East Main Street in Uniontown.

The free ceremony will bring together local officials, community organizations, citizens and more to honor our Fayette County first responders who selflessly volunteered their time following the Flight 93 disaster in nearby Shanksville, Penn.; the 40 victims of that attack; and all who lost their lives or their loved ones on that fateful day.

Fayette County Veteran Affairs Director Brian Bensen will serve as the event’s master of ceremonies and a veteran guest speaker. He said the events of Sept. 11 reminded him “on that day, and the days after” that “during times of tragedy, we get to see the best in people.”

“Some might focus on the negative, but I remember a nation that had a flag in every yard; a nation that had thousands of young Americans trying to enlist in the U.S. military; our veterans asking how they can help; people hand-in-hand with our military and first responders at Ground Zero, refusing to leave until the last victim was pulled from the wreckage,” Bensen said. “At our worst, we will always overcome together, as one nation.”

In addition to participation from local religious leaders, the ceremony will also feature speeches by Fayette County first responders, including county Emergency Management Agency/911 Director Roy Shipley and retired Pennsylvania State Police Officer Jerome Venick. Both men witnessed the devastation at Shanksville firsthand and were part of the cleanup efforts.

The Albert Gallatin High School JROTC will open the ceremony with a presentation of the colors, under direction of Senior U.S. Army Instructor Lt. Col. Joe Walsh, who will also speak about the “9/11” flag during the ceremony. Walsh will then present the flag to Fayette County Commissioners Dave Lohr, chairman; Vince Vicites and Scott Dunn, before it is traditionally hung at the Fayette County Courthouse.

Commissioner Dunn said commemorating the historic date is important, because we must continue to remember the countless police, paramedics, firemen and other first responders lost while trying to rescue people from the Twin Towers in New York City.

“The civilians who went to work that day not knowing it would be their last; the senselessness of it all; we can never allow ourselves to forget that day and what it meant to our country,” Dunn said. “First responders run toward the disaster. It’s who they are and what they do, no matter where

they're from. Fayette County was no different, and I could not be prouder of the individuals from our area that made the sacrifice."

Dunn said he's listened to many stories about that day from Shipley's EMA staff, our local firefighters and more.

"It's heartbreaking to hear the hopelessness in their voice as they describe turning back because there was nothing to do, nobody to save in Shanksville," he said.

Commissioner Vicites said we must never forget Sept. 11, 2001 and the thousands of lives lost to a senseless terrorist attack on American soil.

"Many of our Fayette County first responders played a vital role that day in neighboring Somerset County, helping in any way they could after the crash," Vicites said. "It's important that we honor them, the victims and their families, as the tragic events of that day permanently changed the lives of so many."

Commissioner Lohr said he was surprised by the "very different reactions" people had to "9/11."

"Although most people were shocked, stunned, speechless - others openly said that those terrorist acts had no impact on their lives because it didn't happen right here at home. But in reality, it did happen right here at home, because it happened on U.S. soil, and we as a country were united in a way that hadn't happened since World War II," Lohr said. "The truth is that America changed that day, and it's important for us to acknowledge that. As the old saying goes, 'Those who don't remember history are doomed to repeat it.'"

Lohr said our first responders didn't wake up on Sept. 11, 2001, "expecting to have their day turned upside down."

"It started off as an ordinary day, with ordinary things to do on an ordinary schedule. Then tragedy struck, and our first responders didn't say, 'I'm too busy' or 'That's not my problem.' They put their own lives on hold, leaving behind jobs, family and friends and stepped up to the plate to do what needed to be done," Lohr said. "In a world filled with 'What's in it for me?' - the personal sacrifices made by our first responders on '9/11' are worth commemorating, even celebrating."

In addition to Lohr, Vicites and Dunn; City of Uniontown Mayor Bill Gerke and Police Chief Jason Cox will also be part of the ceremony. Uniontown Fire Chief Dane "Buck" Griffith will coordinate the many first responders and their vehicles, which will line Main Street in downtown Uniontown during the event.

Mayor Gerke and Uniontown City Council will dedicate a stone and plaque during the ceremony, to be displayed at City Hall, in honor of first responders and the 20th anniversary milestone. Mayor Gerke and council members would like to thank Lee's Plumbing and Excavating of New Salem for the donation and installation of the stone.

Mayor Gerke said all first responders "put down their political and personal beliefs and joined together to protect our great nation" when the first emergency calls started coming in on Sept. 11.

"Without their commitment to performing their duties, that day would have been much more tragic than it was. I, along with the rest of our country, am ever-indebted to these fine men and women who put their lives in jeopardy - not only on '9/11,' but every time a call of distress comes in," Gerke

said. "Thank you for your dedication to protecting and aiding everyone."

Gerke said the joint county/city remembrance ceremony shows that our Fayette County communities will "always come together for special events."

"Working as one to remember '9/11' shows how united we are. This union is a great example of how we work locally, and hopefully it will spread far and wide for other areas to take notice that we must be united going forward. This is why our great country is called the United States of America," Gerke said. "It is humbling to see our community leaders and first responders be so willing to take time out of their busy schedules to attend this ceremony. This shows me that an event such as this is very important to these leaders. It's an honor to me to be part of the 20th remembrance of '9/11.' We, as a community, cannot and will not forget that fateful day in our country's history."

Chief Cox said he's thankful for "the many Americans of all walks of life" that volunteered their services in the days following the attacks on our country.

"I'm especially proud to honor the first responders that didn't wait for their next shift or a request to respond," Cox said. "They saw fellow Americans in need and quickly got there to help."

Chief Griffith said he's been honored to work alongside countless first responders since the Sept. 11 tragedy.

"I have the utmost respect for every single first responder, be it fire, police or medical, that respond unselfishly to often uncertain calls," Griffith said. "I am humbled to join our city in recognizing our first responders who make a positive difference every day."

The New Meadow Run and Spring Valley Bruderhof Communities of Farmington will play a key role during the ceremony, as their choir will perform various songs throughout the festivities. Additionally, several of their artist residents have created an art installation for the occasion, which will be unveiled by both the Board of Commissioners and Uniontown City Council.

Titled "40 on 40," the piece will represent the 40 victims of Flight 93, as well as its unveiling site along Main Street, which is also known as state Route 40. Following the remembrance ceremony, the art piece will stand in Storey Square for 40 days - one day for each victim - before being donated to the Uniontown Public Library's art collection for future displays.

Faith Assembly of God will provide an American flag display for the event, and John Fabry of Fabry Funeral Homes will oversee a dove release to close the program. Staples of Uniontown donated water for the ceremony and assisted with program printing services.

Prior to the ceremony, Central Christian Church of Uniontown will toll its bells and play songs at 8:46 a.m.; 9:03 a.m.; 9:37 a.m. and 10:03 a.m. - marking the exact times the four planes struck the Twin Towers, U.S. Pentagon in Washington D.C. and the field in Shanksville.

"It's important to not only honor the victims of these tragedies, but to honor the families of those that were lost," Bensen said. "September 11 is a solemn reminder to always be vigilant in the pursuit of freedom and our way of life."

"September 11th: 20 Years Later" is a free event and all are welcome. For more information, contact Fayette County Veteran Affairs Director Brian Bensen, bbensen@fayettepa.org; Uniontown Director of

Planning and Community Relations Laura Kutek, lkutek@uniontowncity.com; or Fayette County Community Relations Coordinator Kaylie Moore, kmoore@fayettepa.org.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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