



For each memorial to the people who died on September 11, 2001, there are two stories. This is the story of 76 firefighters who died in the Twin Towers while trying to save others. It's also the story of the people and businesses who came together to make sure those firefighters are never forgotten.

St. Michael's Leads Effort To Memorialize Queens Firefighters

by Edward Horn

The story of the 9/11 Queens Firefighter Memorial at St. Michael's Cemetery in East Elmhurst, New York, does not begin with the 2001 terrorist attacks. It begins earlier, with an everyday occurrence at St. Michael's, where I am a memorial counselor.

New York City Fire Department Deputy Chief Alexander Santora and his wife, Maureen, made their preneed arrangements with me at St. Michael's. In the process, we became friends.

The Santoras are a public-spirited, community-minded family. Two of their daughters are public school teachers, while the third serves in the the U.S. Army, as does her husband. Their son, Christopher, followed in his father's footsteps, joining the FDNY in 2001. Only 23, he was one of the department's youngest members.

On September 11, 2001, Christopher Santora was among the more than 300 firefighters who lost their lives while trying to save others as New York City's Twin Towers collapsed. He was the youngest firefighter to die that day.

Having lost their only son, the Santoras were made to endure additional grief first as it became clear there would be few remains to return to the families and later when they learned that fragmentary remains of their son had been misidentified and given to another family for burial.

When the error in DNA screening was discovered, the remains were disinterred and

delivered to the Santora family. The Santoras interred their son with full honors in a community mausoleum at St. Michael's.

A Mandate to Memorialize

Everyone involved felt there also should be a memorial at St. Michael's to honor Christopher. His parents were adamant that a proper memorial should honor *all* Queens firefighters, not their child alone. (They also have honored Christopher's memory by setting up scholarships and a fund to provide equipment for local schools.)

Thus began our efforts to erect what we believe is the only memorial to Queens firefighters. It took almost two years of fundraising, speech making and editorial writing, but the contributions of many people finally made it a reality.

From the beginning, the cemetery staff had the help of two funeral directors, Gus Antonopoulos of Joseph Farenga & Sons, and Tony Siano of Thomas Quinn & Sons, who worked alongside us and donated money, as well.

Memory Medallion Inc., Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, donated more than \$40,000 worth of equipment so that the memorial could include a photo and a biography of up to 600 words long for each firefighter. Glenn Toothman III, Gregor Meyer Jr. and Candice Buchanan of Memory Medallion worked for months to ensure that the photos and biographies would be installed in time for the dedication ceremony.

St. Michael's General Manager Dennis Werner drew on his experience at the Central



Maureen Santora watches as her husband, retired FDNY Deputy Chief Alexander Santora, speaks on behalf of the families of the Queens firefighters who died on 9/11, including their son, Christopher.

Park Conservancy to sculpt the land where the monument would be installed into a reflective paved pathway surrounded by greenery and flower beds.

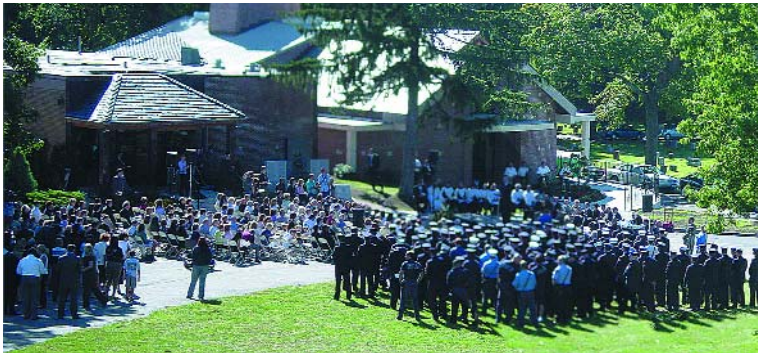
Tom Mullen, president of Mullen Construction Co., New Milford, Connecticut, donated the pavers and supplied the labor to create the walkway.

Donald DeNigris of Dominick DeNigris Monuments, New York City, fashioned and helped design the monument, donating the labor and materials and installing the monument himself. He also donated benches.

The memorial, of black marble and granite, is near Christopher Santora's final resting place. In the center, the image of a firefighter is carved into the marble. The Memory Medallions are attached to the granite on either side.

Over time, we were able to get many more donations to help with the ceremony itself. St. Michael's printer contributed invi-

Right, an overview of the dedication ceremony. Below, Rep. Joseph Crowley of Queens was the keynote speaker. He lost his cousin, Battalion Chief John Moran, on 9/11.



Above, firefighters and their families gathered to honor friends and colleagues. Left, Ed Horn of St. Michael's Cemetery accepts a plaque expressing appreciation from the Uniformed Firefighters Association.

tations and programs. Food and beverages for 600 were donated. Corporate sponsorships as well as donations from local businesses assured us that we would be able to make all attendees comfortable.

A Splendid Dedication

On September 10, 2004, more than 300 family members representing the 76 firefighters who lived or worked in Queens and who died on 9/11 attended a dedication ceremony for the memorial. Sentiment, tears and tribute were the order of the day as one family after another honored their loved ones.

The Santoras spoke, as did Rep. Joseph Crowley, whose cousin, Battalion Chief John Moran, died on 9/11. Attendees also heard from the commanding officer who

ordered firefighters into the towers on 9/11, hoping they could save lives.

Representatives of the mayor, the governor and Sen. Hillary Clinton were on hand, as were Queens Borough President Helen Marshal and numerous other local and state officials, including Rep. Carolyn Maloney, honorary chair of the fund-raising committee for the memorial effort. It was gratifying to hear each public official thank the cemetery.

Canon George W. Brandt of St. Michael's Church officiated at the ceremony, and the St. Michael's choir provided music. After the benediction, two firefighters played "Taps."

Attendees were able to use a hand-held device to view the memorial photos and biographies stored on the Memory Medallions. Family members of fallen firefighters who

viewed the images and stories of their loved ones were amazed and appreciative of the way each individual had been memorialized.

The staff of St. Michael's Cemetery, which was founded in 1859, tries to live up to our founders' belief that "the greatest tribute is not grief, but gratitude."

Everyone who donated time, talent, materials and money to make the 9/11 Queens Firefighters Memorial possible helped us again demonstrate how our cemetery contributes to the community.

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