

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## Have We Forgotten?

T. John Cunningham, President, MSFCA



18 years ago, planes came crashing into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania. Hijackers killed more than 2,900 people that morning and caused billions in dollars' in damage to property, infrastructure, and our economy. In the fire service community, we lost 343 FDNY brothers in this heinous attack.

Yearly anniversaries of that tragic day bring public events, remembrance ceremonies, and TV documentaries covering the rescue and recovery efforts. As life returned to a new normal and the minutes turned into hours, then days, then months, and years, a common phrase emerged: "never forget."

Sadly, we have forgotten.

We've forgotten the united sense of pride and patriotism that emerged on September 12, 2001. We have forgotten the broad call to action for public service. We've forgotten the commitment and focus to strengthening local communities' ability to respond to Mrs. Smith's emergency. We've largely forgotten the sacrifices made that day and the war that rescuers continue to battle to receive healthcare and benefits for rushing into danger as others run out (Jon Stewart's public outlash brought much needed attention to a crisis facing deathly ill first responders).

Immediately after September 11, 2001, I witnessed first-hand a different country. We had collectively experienced a profound loss together. Whether you were living in New York, Minnesota, or California, the Country became united. We were far less concerned or focused on our differences but were rather bonded by the commonalities that make us proud to be Americans. We cried, laughed, struggled, and strengthened together.

At the firehouse, we focused our attention on being the best that we could possibly be. Our doors were flooded with applicants of people looking to serve their community. When the

pager went off, cars practically drove off into the woods as drivers cleared the path to allow police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances to pass. We rushed to Mrs. Smith's house where we received a warm greeting (and some calls I fondly remember, freshly baked cookies and a glass of milk).

There will now be people joining your ranks that were born after September 11, 2001. They will learn about the event through first or third-hand experiences, history lessons, media outlets, social media, and the annual anniversary in which we pledge to "never forget." When they hear a PASS device alarming, they won't connect it to the hundreds of alarms sounding at Ground Zero where our brothers were killed. They may not understand the significance of the 343 stickers that we proudly display on our trucks, helmets, and lockers.

As reflected in our Association's mission, we are focused on creating a stronger, more effective fire service. As leaders, we are grooming the next generation of firefighters that will eventually take our spots in continuing the service to the communities that we serve.

Never forgetting means keeping the passion, commitment, and determination that existed on September 12, 2001, alive. We have a responsibility to those we serve to deliver on the promise we made 18 years ago. ❁

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