

Keynote Address for 12<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 9/11  
Grossmont Community College  
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Good morning, on this the 12<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Terrorist Attacks on America, in New York City, in Arlington County, VA at the Pentagon, and in the skies of our Homeland.

I would like to thank the Administration of Grossmont Community College, and in particular Mr. Donald Harrison, Acting Director for College and Community Relations, and Professor Jeff Lehman, Dept of Chemistry, for inviting me to share some thoughts with you at this gathering to commemorate one of the most repugnant and horrific events of our lives. I was asked to speak as one of the many people who responded when called, to assist in the medical needs of responders and support personnel during the response and recovery phases of the WTC Attack.

As a little bit of background, I have been an Emergency Medicine physician for over 30 years. In 1991, I was asked to start a Disaster Medical Assistance Team here in San Diego, otherwise known in our world as a DMAT. It is a team of physicians, nurses, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, respiratory therapists, communications, security and logistics officers, and administrative personnel with the mission of responding to disasters and special security events to provide medical care, when needed.

Since then, our team has been asked by our Federal Government to respond to nearly 2 dozen disasters, such as the Northridge Earthquake, Floods in the Midwest; multiple Tropical Storms and hurricanes, including Hurricane Katrina, and most recently, Hurricane Sandy. The Terrorist Attacks on America on September 11, 2001 was one of those disasters.

I am not one of the heroes who are celebrated on the 9/11 Anniversaries, who responded on the day of the disaster. By the heroes, I mean many individuals from the NYC Fire Dept, the NYC Police Department, the Port Authority Police of New York and New Jersey, and members of the EMS system from both municipal and private Ambulance companies in the Greater New York area, who put their lives on the line by doing what they were trained to do: rescue people from burning buildings, facilitating evacuations, organizing and managing disaster scenes, securing perimeters, Search and Rescue for injured and trapped people, transporting the injured, and retrieving and identifying the dead. There were many stories of heroism on the part of many other individuals, too, not just First responders, but civilians, including some employees at the WTC, who did not evacuate when it was clear that it was necessary. Instead they stayed to help and save others who were trapped. People such as "The Man in the Red Bandana", Mr. Welles Crowther, who rescued people and made several trips before himself being killed in the collapse of the Towers, and who was named an honorary fireman by the NYFD for his efforts; and of course some of the passengers on United Airlines Flight 93, who fought back against at least 3 hijacking terrorists, resulting in the loss of the aircraft and all aboard at Shanksville, PA, thereby blocking another landmark attack, most likely on our Congress building.

I know that many of you who are enrolled here in college were between the ages of 6 and 10 years old when the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks occurred.

Some of you are older than that, and may have even volunteered and served in our Uniformed Services, and may have been involved in the series of battles and wars that resulted from this attack. Thank you for your service. Some of you are staff and professors, and may even be my age, which is a little over 39. Many of you may have watched TV, over and over, as the media repeated videos of the attacks in NYC that day and continued for several days afterwards. It was even traumatic for you.

When I was small, there had been several events in the lives of my parents that were so memorable they specifically recalled and linked where they were and what they were doing when a specific event occurred. Those were the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941 and the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on April 12, 1945. For me, it was the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, on Nov. 22, 1963. The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks on America are an entirely new event to add to our memories.

- To put these in perspective, the bombing of Pearl Harbor immediately led to the US involvement in World War II. On that Sunday morning, a total of 2,403 Americans died, including 2,335 U.S. servicemen and 68 civilians, who were killed.

- In contrast, 9/11 represented an even larger death toll, 24% larger ...you just heard or may have even read one of the 2,977 names of individuals killed on 9/11/2001, which included

341 firefighters and 2 paramedics from the New York City Fire Department (FDNY);  
37 police officers from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PAPD)]  
23 police officers from the New York City Police Department (NYPD);  
8 emergency medical technicians and paramedics from private emergency medical services  
and  
one bomb-sniffing dog, named Sirius.

As we know, both attacks led to wars, with further significant loss of life, injuries, ongoing economic costs, and disruption in the personal lives of so many. WW II ended 4 years later. We continue to fight a War on Terrorism, 12 years later.

So we are here to commemorate the events of 9/11 and honor the heroes.

What does Commemorate mean?

The Dictionary says: 1) To recall and show respect for someone or something, in a ceremony. From the Latin roots MEMOR (mindful) , MEMORARE (to remind of) + COM ( with) ; (2) to call to remembrance; 3) to mark with a ceremony or a plaque;  
4) to remember something AND HONOR IT.

So I would like to commemorate the events of 9/11 with you by recalling those events, and share with you what the scene was like for our deployment. and show respect to those who came to help. And then I would like to give you some personal thoughts on how each of us, in our own way, can honor the events and do things to help respond to what happened, even though it was 12 years ago.

1) First, as requested, I would like to tell you what it was like to be and work at Ground Zero.

As background, we have a system in this country, called the National Disaster Medical System, which began in 1984 and which consists of several types of teams of volunteers. One kind is a Disaster Medical Assistance Team, and our team is one of around 50 in the nation. The teams are on call 4 months of each year; When an event is threatening to happen, such as a hurricane, or a sudden event, such as an EQ, teams can be activated to respond within 6 to 12 hours, and deploy for up to 14 days.

Another kind of team is called a DMORT, a Disaster Mortuary Operations Response Team which is a group of high-tech morticians, forensic dentists and radiologists, support personnel, technicians and family counselors, and their job is to respectfully identify human remains, using state-of-the-art identification methods.

Additionally there are National Veterinary Response Teams, made up of Veterinarians and veterinary technicians, to respond to and manage disasters which involve animals, either as responders or as victims.

All disasters start out as local responses. When the attacks occurred in NYC, it was the local EMT's, paramedics, Firefighters and Police who responded. Many others from surrounding counties, converged on the scene, and provided Mutual Aid to the site and to fill in at local fire houses. Local hospitals were busy, but wondered why there weren't more patients. Patients requiring specialty care were transferred to such facilities as Burn Units and Trauma Units.

On the day of the attacks, 4 DMAT teams from that area were activated and traveled by ground to the NYC area and to Arlington County, VA. Remember that all air traffic in the continental US was totally suspended, and inbound international flights were grounded while en route, for many days. Because of the large area of the World Trade Center area, which was 16 acres, and consisted of 7 buildings, not just the Twin Towers, the operational plan chosen was to use the DMATs to set up 5 treatment sites: 4 would be on each side of the area of the twin towers, and a 5<sup>th</sup> site would be at a distance away, such that if any patients were injured badly enough to require hospitalization, they would be transferred to that site where ambulances could pick them up.

On day #2 only 11 people were found alive and rescued from the debris. NDMS had a conference call with each of the team commanders in the country, as it was anticipated that NDMS involvement was going to be sustained for couple of months. A schedule was made up for all the teams in the country, "just in case" and each was given a 14 day period to schedule their members to deploy. We were given November 13<sup>h</sup> to November 27<sup>th</sup>.

Who were our patients?

Well, the Response, Search and Rescue, and then Recovery phases of the response were scheduled on a 24 hours/7 days per week basis. During the initial Response and Search and Rescue phases, there were 12,000 workers at this extremely dangerous debris field, called the "Pile" and then later, "the Pit." There were ongoing fires that burned until late December. It required the wearing of airway protection and hard hats on a continuous basis.

During the first week, up to 300 visits per day to the medical treatment tents were seen. Reasons for the visits were both occupationally related, with many visits for eye foreign bodies, breathing

difficulties, wheezing, coughing, and orthopedics injuries from trips and falls while working the rubble piles. Additionally, search dogs with paw injuries were also seen. Every two weeks, the teams rotated. As the weeks wore on, as the population of workers decreased to 7 to 10,000 on site, the number of visits also decreased, down to 30 to 50 per day, and the response was reduced to 4, then 3 tents. The size of the teams requested was also decreased, first from 35, down to 30 and then to 8/team. On the day before we were to depart, November 12 – [American Airlines Flight 587](#), an Airbus A300, crashed into a Queens neighborhood in New York City, and all 260 on board were killed. Concern for possible terrorism led to the request that we increase our team size back up to 20, which we did overnight.

What was it like when we arrived?

I vividly recall the first day, of that deployment. And all other days as well.

We were bussed down to the site from mid-town Manhattan, going thru several security checks. The bus let us off on the west side of the site, behind the #1 World Finance Center, and so we had to walk to the site between two buildings, before we actually saw the site.

My jaw dropped as the site came into view. The burned out hulks of WTC Buildings #4 and #7 were off to the left. Straight ahead were the twin tower sites, one of which, the South Tower, was a shallow square “pit” around 5 to 10 feet below ground level. The entire area was surrounded by other tall downtown buildings, with giant nets hanging down from their roofs to the ground. I was told that the debris they were excavating at that time was from the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the S. Tower but that it had been compressed down into the ground by the collapse.

There were plumes of smoke still rising from the debris field. Seven fires were still burning. The heat below the ground was still so intense, that, as the backhoes would remove layers of debris, occasionally a plume of flame might ignite and flare up, as air finally mixed with super hot debris that had not yet burned, and it would ignite. This was the basis for the burns and continued eye problems from foreign bodies that would make up part of what we would see during the deployment.

We were taken to

the first tent, about 50 yards from the edge of the pit. It was underneath the original overpass walkway that connected the Marriott Hotel to the 1 World Financial Center building.

When I asked why it was underneath the walkway, I was taken to another tent, out in the open, where just supplies were being kept. I immediately looked up to see large slits cut in the roof of the tent, and I was told, “ You are only allowed in this tent when the wind is < 5 mph.” When the wind picked up, pieces of broken glass from the thousands of windows on the adjacent buildings would be blown free and come hurtling down, and the cuts in the tent roof were from such pieces of glass. Hard hats were DEFINITELY required at all times in the area but they might not be enough to protect from that sort of hazard.

Working the area were nearly two dozen gigantic cranes and a large number of back hoes and dump trucks. The site reminded me of a field of grazing dinosaurs, except that the mouths were taking large bites of building remains instead of leaves from the trees.

As the backhoes dug thru and sifted thru the debris,, a small group of firefighters would be there to sift thru the debris looking for human body parts. If a body part or body were identified, the digging would immediately cease, an honor guard would form and the body or body part would be formally

and respectfully carried out of the pit to where it could be identified as to location, and then on to the DMORT ops site. In all aspects of the recovery, the utmost respect was given to all human remains.

For us, shifts were 12 hours long, either 7 am to 7 pm, or overnight from 7 pm till 7 am. It was imperative that at all times on the site, a hard hat was worn, and all forays out of the tent required a partial face mask with canister filters. Unfortunately it was not clear how often the canisters were to be changed, considering the heavy load of particulate matter, hence the ongoing annual monitoring of pulmonary function testing for all responders who worked the site.

We met an incredible array of responders and recovery workers during our work there. Many of the EMTs, paramedics, and policemen, on the site, had been responders on the day of the attack, and shared stories of their personal experiences, reflecting incredible dedication to their jobs. It was more of a “calling” really, for many of these people, some of whom were still nursing injuries. There was tremendous camaraderie among all the workers there. We were able to explain about NDMS, the National Disaster Medical System, and what we did, and they would explain what they did on the day of the attack, and since.

We saw 12 to 30 patients per day. Every day that people work at a site, the same medical problems that they could have experienced at home, could be experienced at the site, such as chest pains, hypertension, and diabetes issues, in addition to the acute events from working at the site. One backhoe struck a 16,000 volt cable, which was still live, and the equipment operator was thrown 10 feet off the backhoe, sustaining neck injury as well as an irregular heart rhythm from the electricity, and had to be treated on site before being transported to an ER for both the heart problem and for trauma. Each of the patients had their own story to tell.

Of other memories of the deployment, I cannot fail to mention the many volunteers from a number of organizations, who set up a respite for workers, and provided hot meals, a pillow, and a place to take a break indoors from the smoke and stench of the site. The historic St. Paul’s Chapel at Trinity Church, where George Washington was first inaugurated, was one such respite, and now houses memorabilia from 9/11.

Along the outside fence, and on tables set up alongside the fence, were many messages with Missing persons photos, Letters of thanks to the First Responders who lost their lives, and even a collection of Teddy Bears in memory of the children who lost their lives, with an American Airlines banner; two of the aircraft and crew were American Airlines victims: Flight # 11, which departed from Boston with 92 aboard, and was hijacked and flown into the North tower and Flight # 77, with 94 aboard, which left LaGuardia Airport and was flown into the Pentagon.

As you know the other 2 flights were United Airlines flights. Another memory was visiting the 10/10 Firehouse, Home of the 10th Engine and 10<sup>th</sup> Ladder Companies and the only Firehouse that was actually located inside Ground Zero and buried under 40 feet of debris. And there is no way I can forget to mention the American flags, for it was flown, and hung, and draped everywhere, as a sign of the patriotism that was aroused in so many by the enormity of the event, and served to reunite the spirit that is America.

As it turned out, we were in fact the last team to be rotated thru the WTC as part of the immediate response, and care of the Recovery workers was handed over to an Occupational Health Group. It

was our duty to take down the last two tents, and I recall making every one of our team members wear their face mask respirators one last time, as two and a half months of dust and debris that had accumulated in the creases and on the roofs of the tents was once again made airborne.

So, how can we remember and honor those who were attacked and killed on that Day of Enormity? If this sounds like an introduction to a seminar, so be it. I don't even know what department it would belong in... History, maybe? Religion? Ethics? Maybe the Grossmont Dept of Nursing!!

First, by Never Forgetting....

By REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS BY NAME, as individuals, as you all have done today.

Next, by reading about, and retelling the stories of the heroes. Understanding and emulating the principles they demonstrated: Devotion to Duty. Service. Responsibility. Caring. and the Desire to Change the outcomes for the better. Seeing something wrong and trying to fix it. Respect for life.

How else? By visiting the memorials, when you travel.

The sites: The New 911 Memorial at the WTC site, in its last stages of completion. where the names of the victims of the Terrorist Murders are inscribed, around the reflecting pools which were built at the sites of the Twin Towers' footprints.

The memorial at Shanksville, PA;

Memorial Grove, in Alexandria, VA.

The 10/10 Firehouse.

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St. Paul's Chapel, across the street and around the block from the WTC site.

Attending the World Memorial, organized by SD Fireman Mitch Mendler, 9/11 Display and Exhibit, at the Hilton Bay Front, 1 Park Blvd., until 7 pm tonight when a closing ceremony will be held. . and where you can meet Retired NYFD Lieutenant Joe Torrillo, who survived entrapment in the collapse of the first tower, only to be stuck by debris from the second tower.

How else? By displaying the flag on Anniversaries such as this, at half staff, to show respect for what our nation has gone through.

Next, we need to stand up to those that always seem to appear out of the blue, to deny the reality of an event such as this.

Just as there are still Holocaust deniers, despite the overwhelming evidence and testimonies of witnesses, that the Holocaust occurred, SO TOO there are deniers of the involvement of Al Qaeda and Islamists in the WTC Towers event.

These "Conspiracy Theorists" often attempt to "blame the victim," or the US GOVERNMENT blame Jews, or blame gays or bisexuals by coming up with ridiculous rationalizations, even after the leader of Al-Qaida admitted his responsibility, and their claims do not fit any of the actual facts of the events. They deserve to be called on this, particularly when statements are made that are untrue.

Next, we need to understand the forces at work that directly led to an extremely dedicated suicidal attack on our people, on our cities, and on our financial institutions. We can try to learn as much as we can about the forces of evil in the world in order to recognize them and oppose them.

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We need to read books, such as *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, by Lawrence Wright. We need to understand what the result of extremism is. The German Philosopher

Georg Hegel stated, "We Learn from History that we do not learn from history." We need to prove him wrong.

Another way of Commemorating 9/11 is understanding the need to develop personal insights that would affect our own behaviors in preparing for and responding to further terrorist attacks, and other disasters. WE NEED TO DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING AS TO HOW we may decrease our chances of becoming victims. We need to read books, like Amanda Ripley's THE UNTHINKABLE: Who survives when disaster strikes, and Why. WE NEED TO HAVE OUR OWN PERSONAL DISASTER PLANS.

We need to understand that many members of the Islamic faith also abhor the extremist terrorism viewpoints of some sects, and not to condemn entire groups for the actions of a few in that group. You do not want to be held accountable for actions of others in your own group, either.

It behooves our honoring the victims and responders and their families, to not participate in activities that support and finance further terrorist acts. We can say "No!" to buying, distributing and/or using illicit drugs, since much of the major drug trade is in fact supporting and funding terrorism in many of its forms. Similarly we need to avoid supporting the trade in counterfeit goods, again another ploy used by terrorists to fund their activities.

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Let us all strive to make the world a better place.

Let us all contribute to society, and helping each other.

Let us understand that what happened on Sept 11, 2001 can happen again. It will happen again, in a different format, when one group of people wants to impose their religious beliefs and biases on others. In the setting of a college or university, that can still happen, and does, and we must make certain not to be coerced. We must promote education and enlightenment.

H.G. Wells once said, "HUMAN HISTORY BECOMES MORE AND MORE A RACE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CATASTROPHE."

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Let us all understand that the impact disasters such as the Terrorist Attacks on America have on us is lifelong and profound.

For the responders to 9/11, studies have shown that there is a 15 to 20% increased risk of cancer from exposure to toxins and carcinogens at the site. Of the 20 team members who responded from our team, 2 died of cancer within 10 years. Others are monitored yearly. But every one of them would volunteer again.

The search and rescue effort in the immediate aftermath at the World Trade Center site involved [ironworkers](#), [structural engineers](#), heavy machinery operators, [asbestos workers](#), [boilermakers](#), [carpenters](#), cement masons, construction managers, [electricians](#), insulation workers, [machinists](#), [plumbers](#) and [pipefitters](#), [riggers](#), [sheet metal workers](#), steelworkers, [truckers](#) and [teamsters](#), [American Red Cross](#) volunteers, Police, National Guard, psychologists and mental health workers, and many others. There were also about 400 [working dogs](#), the largest deployment of dogs in the nation's history. By mentioning all these people, it is another way of honoring their contributions and hard work.

Perhaps in your careers, whether it is in a medical or non-medical field, you would consider using your acquired, professional skills to assist others as a volunteer in the time of their GREAT need. Not all the jobs on a medical team are medical.

It would be enlightened, and fitting. It would continue the tradition of service that showed up on September 11, 2001.

I would like to borrow a quote from Dr. Albert Schweitzer to conclude. He said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Thank you for your attention and your interest and concern to be here today.