

Mayor's Remarks for the 25th Anniversary Memorial of September 11, 2001

Good morning, everyone. I am Mayor Brian Bernstein.

Let me begin by welcoming the **Vialonga** family, Rev. Dr. **Kwak** of the United Methodist Church, **Father Raphael Lee** and **Father Steve Chun** of Saint Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, **Dr. Joseph Cirillo**, NVD Superintendent, **Nicole Sweeney**, NVD School Business Administrator, students from the DMS 8th Grade class **Shreya Iyer** (singing), **Richard McConville** (taps), the Editors of the DMS Press: **Richard McConville**, **Zoe Park**, **Audrey Kim**, **Everley Sell**, **Cailyn Shiau**, **Ella Shin**, **Mrs. Wendy Heffler** (8th grade language arts DMS with students), our other distinguished guests, members of the Borough Council, our residents, the Demarest Police Department, Volunteer Fire Department, Volunteer Ambulance Corps, our DPW, Borough employees, and all of the friends and families who have joined us today.

Thank you for being here as we mark the **25th anniversary of September 11, 2001**.

Twenty-five years. A quarter of a century.

And yet, for so many of us, the memories of that September morning remain remarkably vivid – where we

were, what we were doing, who we were with, and the moment we realized that our country, and our lives, had forever changed, and loved ones had been taken from us.

Today, we gather to remember and honor all those who lost their lives on September 11, and the many who have died in the years since from 9/11-related illnesses. Nearly 3,000 people were killed on 9/11, but thousands more – including first responders who spent months working at the site – have since died from 9/11-related cancers and other illnesses.

Before we continue, I ask that you please join me in a moment of silence for the nearly 3,000 innocent people whose lives were taken on September 11, 2001, and those we have lost since from 9/11-related illnesses.

More than 700 of those victims had ties to New Jersey.

Please rise if you are able.

Moment of silence.

Thank you.

We also express our enduring gratitude to the firefighters, police officers, EMTs, paramedics, members of our military, and countless other emergency responders who ran toward danger that morning – and to those who

continue to stand watch and protect us every day, regardless of the personal risk.

Every year, Demarest gathers here because September 11 is not simply part of our nation's history. **It is part of our community's history. It is personal to us.**

Today, we remember six men whose lives and families will forever be part of our Demarest family:

Christopher Vialonga.

Rick Solow.

Johnny Cortazzo.

Scott Vasel.

Martin Wohlforth.

Angel Nunez.

We say their names because behind every name was a life – a son, daughter, mother, wife, husband, father, brother, sister, an uncle, a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker. People who were loved, who had plans for tomorrow, and who should have had many more years with their families.

And by remembering them, we honor not only the lives they lived, but the families who have carried their memories for these past 25 years.

Today, we especially remember **Christopher Vialonga.**

Chris, known to many simply as *Vio* or *V*, was only 30 years old. He was a foreign-exchange trader with Carr Futures, working on the 92nd floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

He was a wonderful son, a devoted and loving brother and uncle, a loyal friend to many and an avid Jets fan.

Chris did not survive the attack on the North Tower. Had September 11 never happened, Chris would be **55 years old today**.

Think about all the years, birthdays, celebrations, friendships, marriages, children and grandchildren that were stolen when those lives were stolen.

That is why we remember. And, that is why we must never forget!

At 8:46 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11 struck the North tower.

Then, at 9:03 a.m., the second plane struck the South Tower.

We watched the towers burn against an otherwise beautiful blue sky. And then, at 9:59 a.m., we watched the South Tower collapse. And at 10:28 a.m., we watched the North Tower collapse. **[Bells 5-5-5]**

In the span of only 42 minutes, from 8:46 to 10:28 a.m. 2753 people died at the World Trade Center site in NYC. In addition, 403 emergency workers, including 343 firefighters, 23 NYC Police officers and 37 Port Authority police officers and 246 innocent passenger and crew members on the flights used in the attacks that day died. And, we lost others, like Rick Solow and Johnny Cortazzo, to 9/11 related illness.

For many of us, we watched the horror of the buildings collapsing. We saw the fear of innocent people running for safety, and we witnessed bravery of the men and women who ran towards the buildings to save lives.

But for some, like the Vialonga family and the families of all the people who were working in the towers and the families of the rescue workers that raced into the towers, time stood still, **they felt the ground beneath their feet give way like the crumbling towers, every breath they took was labored, if at all possible, and each one would have given anything to save their loved ones, even trading places.** But that choice was not theirs to make, so they watched the devastating and unthinkable reality unfolding before them.

Out of respect for them and their losses, we gather to remember each of the innocent lives lost. It's an honor to

do so and an obligation to the memories of each person lost.

While we describe September 11 in numbers – to understand the magnitude of the loss - September 11 is not really a story about numbers.

It is a story about people.

It's about a grief that cannot be spoken; about a pain that is older than the age of loved ones lost;

It's about empty chairs at dinner tables.

Parents who lost children. Children who grew up without a mother or father. Brothers, sisters, family members, co-workers, loved ones and friends lost. Families celebrating weddings, births, graduations and holidays with someone forever missing.

Twenty-five years later, that absence remains.

But something else remains, as well.

We remember what happened **after** the attacks.

Twenty-five years ago, on one of the darkest days in our nation's history, we also witnessed the very best of America. While others were running from danger, first responders were running toward it - not knowing what

awaited them but knowing that someone needed their help.

We remember firefighters climbing the stairs while everyone else was coming down.

We remember police officers, EMTs and ordinary citizens helping complete strangers.

We remember Americans standing together – not asking about politics, religion, race or background, but simply asking:

"How can I help?"

That spirit of unity, courage and compassion may be one of the most important lessons September 11 has taught us.

A generation has now grown up with no personal memory of that day. Many young people know September 11 only through photographs, videos, classroom lessons and the stories we tell them.

That makes gatherings like this more important, not less.
It is our responsibility to carry the memory forward.

We must tell our children and grandchildren what happened. We must tell them about the lives that were

lost. We must tell them about Chris, Rick, Johnny, Scott, Martin and Angel.

And we must tell them about the extraordinary courage and humanity Americans showed one another during this very dark chapter in our nation's history.

Twenty-five years later, our promise remains the same:

We will remember.

We will honor.

And we will never forget.

We honor Christopher Vialonga and all those we lost by living our own lives with greater kindness, courage and compassion – by appreciating our families, caring for our neighbors, supporting those who protect us, and never taking for granted the freedoms and opportunities we share.

To the Vialonga family and to every family touched by September 11 -- **Demarest remembers with you.**

Your loved ones have not been, and will not be, forgotten.

They remain part of the history, the heart, and the family of our community.

I want to thank you for joining us today and for continuing to keep their memories alive.

May God bless those we lost and continue to watch over their families, and our first responders and May God bless America.