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FEATURED

Ceremony

# Napa remembers 9/11 as speaker urges unity, tribute through service

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The American flag over Napa's 9/11 Memorial Garden on Wednesday. An afternoon ceremony commemorated those who died in the terrorist attacks of 18 years ago.

Sarah Klearman, Register

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It's been 18 years since September 11, 2001. Children born on that day can now vote — much of today's younger generation, some of them now entering college, wasn't yet born.

On Wednesday, the Napa community rallied to commemorate the anniversary of the terrorist attacks during which hijacked planes flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C. and a field near Shanksville in southwestern Pennsylvania, ultimately claiming the lives of thousands.

The ceremony, held in front of the 9/11 Memorial Garden on Main Street, was hosted by Napa's Sunrise Rotary Club and led by club member and veteran Bernie Narvaez. The crowd gathered in front of the memorial, which features 30 tons of steel from the World Trade Center and panels inscribed with the names of men and women who lost their lives in the attacks.

Narvaez, who said he joined the military because of 9/11, described the importance of continuing to teach new generations about the tragedy.

“Our youth weren't born yet,” said Narvaez, while holding his young daughter. “No matter how sad and horrific it was, we can't forget the people who died, the victims and the heroic nature of what they did.”

For Brenda Burke, a Rotary club member who has lived in Napa for over 20 years, the memorial, installed in 2013, is still an emotional sight.

“I’ve become more connected to it – every time you pass it, you stop, you read more names and it becomes more real,” Burke said.

Keynote speaker Josh Fryday, former Novato councilman and the state’s chief service officer, spoke of the country on September 12, 2001: shocked and in mourning, but united by a collective sense of grief and a desire to help.

“It was a tragedy that forever changed our country, my life and many of yours,” Fryday said in his speech. “And intertwined with that tragedy is this history of breathtaking willingness to serve each other in many different ways.”

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Through service to each other today, he said, we pay homage to the memory of the victims of that day.

It’s also a way to pay tribute to the heroism in wake of the attacks, Fryday added. Those attacks killed nearly 3,000 people; of those, 412 were emergency workers, including firefighters, police officers and paramedics who died attempting to save others. Elsewhere in the country, people rushed to donate blood and provide support from afar.

“In the shadow of that dark day, we stood united: one nation, one community, one people,” Fryday said.

Lisa Gillen, who moved to Napa four years ago from Ireland with her husband Andrew, attended the ceremony with her two children, Rory, 2, and Lucy, 1. Rory and Lucy are dual citizens, Gillen said, and she and her husband have made a point to instill in them all the ideals of being an Irish American.

“We think it’s important to honor these people who lost their lives in such tragic circumstances,” Gillen said. “This is something that we’ll talk about for the rest of our days, the kids will hear from us, and we’ll bring them down here and show them this.”

The ceremony also featured a speech from Napa Chief of Police and Rotary Club member Robert Plummer and Genavieve Connealy, professional performer and owner of Studio G in Napa. Connealy sang the national anthem and “America the Beautiful,” after which white doves were released into the air.

Gordon Huether, the artist behind the design of the memorial, calls it a “permanent reminder of a pivotal tragedy.”

“To have it here in Napa is pretty amazing to me,” Huether said. “It was designed to support that remembrance ceremony every year, but also to serve as a daily reminder.”

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