

Remarks
Commissioner James S. Simpson
10th Anniversary
NJDOT Employee Memorial
September 8, 2010

It is an honor to welcome each of you here today on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of our Employee Memorial.

It is actually 10 years to the day that our Memorial was dedicated.

When we dedicated our Memorial, there were 32 fallen colleagues whose names were on the Memorial Wall.

Since that time, two more names were added based on requests made by NJDOT employees that were researched by Employee Memorial Committee staff:

Kyle Kristensen in 2004.

Brian Everson in 2008.

And tragically, we lost two more employees – Eduardo Jimenez, who died in June of 2007.

And, Joe Kealey, who died in January of 2010.

We honored his memory in July of this year.

We, therefore, today, are honoring 36 of our fallen colleagues for the ultimate sacrifice that each of them made in service to this Department and the State of New Jersey.

It is also an honor to welcome four NJDOT Commissioners today: Jim Weinstein, Jamie Fox, Jack Lettiere and Kris Kolluri.

I'm also honored to welcome Dennis Keck, who served our agency for a time as Acting Commissioner.

I also wish to recognize Elizabeth "Biz" Dilts, wife of Steve Dilts. I know Steve wished very much to be here today. I know that Steve is a very dedicated supporter of the Employee Memorial, and we thank him for his unflagging and continued support.

There are also many other dignitaries here today who have supported the Employee Memorial during their tenure at the Department, and we are grateful to them for coming back and for helping to sustain the Memorial over the years.

I also have to single out and give appropriate credit to Jim Weinstein.

When Lou Caruso – a 50 year veteran of NJDOT -- died in the line of duty in 1999, his death served as the catalyst for the building of the Memorial.

But it was also Jim's vision and leadership that provided the needed "traction" to get this effort going.

Ten years later, I am reminded of an old Chinese proverb: "The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step."

We're here today because of that step taken by Jim.

With Jim's support, a 20 member committee made up of NJDOT employees spearheaded the design and construction of this beautiful memorial.

Special tribute goes to former NJDOT employees John Spedding, Steve Cook, Nancy Ciaraffoli and Frank Bocchini who all worked hard to advance the Memorial Project.

The concept for it was also embraced by employees here, our retirees, and, of course, the families of our honored fallen.

I can't tell you how honored I am to lead an agency whose own employees created such a beautiful memorial, and credit goes to those who continue to serve on the Employee Memorial Committee responsible for maintaining it and ensuring that the memory of our fallen colleagues will live on in our hearts forever.

We're also here today to honor those who died on 9-11, which occurred after just one year's existence for our Memorial. Since that time, we have honored the September 11 victims without fail.

In fact, our Memorial pays tribute to the 74 members of the Port Authority of NY and NJ who died on September 11. One of the Memorial fountains has been dedicated to honor their memory.

Their valiant efforts to save lives cost them their own, and we pay grateful acknowledgement and thanks for these members of our extended transportation family.

Since 9-11, we have also devoted a portion of our Annual Remembrance Ceremony to honor those who came to rescue victims of this tragedy and became victims themselves – Law Enforcement Representatives, our Firefighters, and our Search and Rescue Teams.

We thank those who are present here today in these capacities for their continued efforts to help people in need.

We also continue to honor our Military – our soldiers and sailors who have sacrificed their lives and those who continue to protect us. We are grateful to our NJDOT employees and family members who currently serve in the military so that we can enjoy the freedoms that we have.

As much as our Memorial honors our fallen, it also acknowledges the living.

It represents a commitment to transportation . . . a commitment to safety. . . a commitment to the highest standards of public service.

The words at the base of the Memorial reflect this: Service, Dedication, and Sacrifice.

This entire project, from Day One to today, is a lasting testament to the dedication, professionalism and spirit of our employees.

We're here because of those employees.

We stand among the bricks, mortar and memories enshrined in our Memorial because of them.

And to the families of our fallen, there are no words that can minimize the loss you experienced.

We thank the Jimenez and Kealey families for being with us today.

We also thank Terry Kresge's (Kres-ke) family for being here with us today. Terry died in the line of duty in 1988.

Please know that we stand with you, and that the NJDOT Family is here for you when needed.

The writer Washington Irving once wrote some beautiful words that I believe are worth sharing today:

“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of strength. They speak more eloquently than a thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, but they are the same messengers for unspeakable love.”

The loss you experienced is overwhelming, and I believe, therefore, it is absolutely incumbent upon all of us to renew our efforts to improve safety.

We can best honor the memory of our fallen by making real strides in safety.

We can honor most eloquently and effectively co-workers like Eduardo and Joe by making them the last names placed on the Memorial.

I know all of us here feel this way, and I know you will hear shortly some remarkable and appreciative words by the Commissioners who served when this Memorial was in place.

They share, as we all do, dedication and a sense of purpose to do all that we can, in whatever capacity we serve, whether now or in the future, into making our roadways safe.

We owe it to the fallen enshrined here -- and their families.

On this 10th Anniversary, may we continue to keep alive the memories of our fallen colleagues and the ultimate sacrifice that they made while doing their jobs.

Thank you and God Bless you.