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Solidarity and Gratitude Emphasized at Darien's Twentieth Anniversary Observance of 9/11

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The feeling of solidarity among Americans in the days and weeks after Sept. 11, 2001 is something to remember and cultivate, both speakers said Saturday morning at Darien's 20th anniversary commemoration of the 9/11 terrorist attack.

"Something miraculous grew from those dark days," First Selectman Jayme Stevenson said to the crowd of just over 100 people gathered by the memorial behind Middlesex Middle School.

"We came together as one community — united by caring and compassion for one another and this great nation," she said. "The sense of love and pride for America was palpable — hope began to rise from the ashes that our nation would emerge stronger than ever."

Terry Gaffney, chair of the Darien Monuments and Ceremonies Commission and master of ceremonies at the

event, said that at that time, which he referred to as "9/12":

"People treated each other with kindness and compassion, even if they didn't know one another. [...] So my challenge for each of us is what can we do to recapture that sentiment, to carry it forward? What can we do that is extraordinary, that will make us remember — not only remember 9/11, but to remember 9/12 and who we are and what we can be."

Both speakers also praised the courage of first responders who entered the burning buildings, and Stevenson expressed gratitude for the soldiers who died in the wars that sprang from that day's attack:

"So today, as we hold in our hearts the treasured memories of our lost loved ones and friends and as we honor the service and sacrifice of our first responders, let us also remember that we are One Nation, Under God and indivisible only if we set aside our differences to uphold America's most precious blessings — liberty and justice for all. [...]"

"Pray for our brave soldiers who, for 20 years and to the very last moment, gave their lives in the name of freedom."

U.S. Rep. Jim Himes and several state legislators, including state Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff and state Rep. Matt Blumenthal together placed a wreath beside the monument.

Two other legislators in the group, state Rep. Terry Wood and state Sen. Patricia Billie Miller embraced each other for a long, emotional moment in front of the placed wreath as the other legislators walked back into the crowd.

The ceremony was paused for over 15 minutes when a member of the audience had a medical emergency. An ambulance came to take the person to a hospital.

After the pause, town officials and the legislators, along with fire department officials, Police Chief Donald Anderson and various youths placed long-stemmed roses against the small granite monument. That ritual is a longstanding tradition for the annual Darien ceremony.

The Darien event has not included stating the names of town residents who died at the World Trade Center that day, Gaffney told the crowd. That's partly because the ceremony is supposed to help Darienites commemorate all the dead, and the victims Darien residents knew or are related to often come from other communities.

Also, he said, people whose family members died in the attack have moved in and out of town. One widow had asked that her husband's name not be mentioned at the ceremony.

The town's 9/11 monument was an initiative of a Darien ninth grader who's goal was to create a permanent memorial for the event, Gaffney said. The student, Josh Doying, was a boy scout who made the task his project as part of becoming an Eagle scout. He raised the money and organized the creation of the monument.

Gaffney pointed out that students in Darien's schools at every grade level had not even been born before the terrorist attack in 2001. He asked parents to bring up the subject with their children at the dinner table.

"To them," the students not yet born that day, "9/11 is a story much like the JFK assassination, like Hiroshima, like Pearl Harbor — it's something they read in a history book with a photograph. But do they know the stories behind the story?"

At length, Gaffney described various things worth remembering about the event, including first responders rushing into the buildings, toward danger, even as people rushed out of them. He noted that of the 2,977 who died that day at the World Trade Center, 412 of them were first responders, and that more than 400 first responders have died since then from health problems they acquired that day or in subsequent days when many worked among the rubble of the site, searching for victims' remains.

[9-11 Memorial Service](#) from [Darien TV79](#) on [Vimeo](#).