



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Cape May Fire Chief Alex Coulter, right, and Lt. Michael Eck share their experiences of assisting with the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center during the Patriot Day ceremony at Cape May's Sunset Pavilion.



A sizable crowd gathered Sept. 11 at Cape May's Sunset Pavilion to observe the city's Patriot Day ceremony on the 13th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

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Patriot Day

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"Some of the things I saw personally and others responding up there saw, I'm not going to share with you today," Coulter continued.

He said the details of the event provided by news media did not do it justice compared with what firefighters actually witnessed.

"It spared the public the horrific act that we witnessed with our own eyes," Coulter said.

He noted that innocent civilians and first responders perished.

"I hope no one here ever takes first responders for granted or the military for granted," Coulter said.

He said those who serve in public safety do it because they love people and are willing to help. Coulter said he hoped no one would forget the events of Sept. 11 and keep the first responders and victims in their prayers.

Eck said he has spoken about the events of Sept. 11 only a handful of times aside of with his brothers who worked by his side that day. He said the event brings memories to him he sometimes would rather not remember.

"I rarely discuss what I saw in those days," Eck said. "I just don't know that many people would understand, nor do I want to explain."

He said he remembered television networks playing news footage for days on the first anniversary of Sept. 11.



The Cape Harmonaires sing the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.'

On the second, third and fourth anniversaries, television networks had live coverage from New York of loved ones saying goodbye, Eck said.

"As the years carry on, I seem to notice the news doesn't play as much footage about 9-11 as it did," he said. "Has the news forgotten, have our schools forgotten?"

Eck said he was pleased to see so many people attending the ceremony, those who have not forgotten Sept. 11. He said he taught his son about 9-11, something all parents should do.

"But there's good news. All the terrible parts of the days following 9-11 that I remember, I can remember events that actually bring a smile to my face," Eck said. "I don't believe they overshadow the bad, but there are things that make me love this country and what it stands for."

He said he recalled walking the areas surrounding ground zero where he saw "everybody helping each other," even complete strangers.

"You couldn't walk 15 feet without someone offering you a water bottle, a piece of food or dry clothing," Eck said.

He said he saw signs thanking emergency workers and troops. Eck said 9-11 made America stronger and showed the world this country was stronger than cowards preying on the innocent.

"This county stands for freedom, we fight for what is just," Eck said.

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