

## CRDA funds boost Atlantic City 9/11 ceremony

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ATLANTIC CITY — For the past 10 years, the Saracini-O’Neill AC911 Memorial organization has been dedicated to preserving the memory of the 2,977 people killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

The memorial was a joint effort among the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, the city and Bob Pantalena, the founder of the Saracini-O’Neill AC911 organization, but the all-volunteer group has kept the annual ceremony alive during the past decade.

In July, the CRDA voted to spend \$17,005 to sustain the memorial and support the ceremony.

The first ceremony that will see the impact of some of the CRDA money starts at 10 a.m. Friday at the Saracini-O’Neill Atlantic City 9/11 Memorial at Jackson Avenue and the Boardwalk.

“My intent was to have that (the \$17,005) cover us until we could raise enough money to sustain ourselves,” Pantalena said. “For eight years, I spent money out of my pocket, supplemented by my friends. I reluctantly agreed with a friend to apply to CRDA for funding.”

The \$17,005 grant has to be spent within a year’s time, so the money will directly impact this year’s and next year’s ceremonies, Pantalena said.

Pantalena’s organization also creates a field of 1,000 flags for Patriot Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day and the day of the Atlantic City Airshow. The flags need to be replenished because of wind and rain. At least 40 flags are planted at the 9/11 memorial itself, Pantalena said.

The organization loans out a 30-foot-by-60-foot polyester flag and a 15-foot-by-25-foot tattered flag. Some of the money will be used by the organization to buy more flags, Pantalena said.

During Friday’s ceremony, four South Jersey Sept. 11 victims will be honored:

- Victor Saracini, 51, who grew up in the Ducktown section of Atlantic City and graduated from Atlantic City High School. He captained United Flight 175, which crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center. He lived in Yardley, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Ellen, and his two daughters.
- John P. O’Neill, 49, grew up in Atlantic City and graduated from Holy Spirit High School in Absecon. A former FBI counter-terrorism expert, he headed the investigations into the bombing of the USS Cole and the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. A few weeks before the attacks, O’Neill took over as director of security at the World Trade Center.
- Patricia Cody, 46, moved to Brigantine with her husband, Tom, six months before the attacks. Cody kept a vacation home in Brigantine for years. A managing director at Marsh and McLennan Insurers, she was attending a meeting on Sept. 11 at the World Trade Center.

- Andrew Alamenno, 37, of Wildwood Crest, worked on the 104th floor of the north tower of the World Trade Center as a money-market trader for Cantor Fitzgerald.

In addition to commemorating those who died on Sept. 11, 2001, the ceremony will honor “heroes among us,” Pantalena said:

- Francis Joseph Kelly, who came to Atlantic City at age 19 to live and work with his aunt, Marie Murphy, owner of Murphy Vending in Atlantic City. Kelly was killed in action at 24 on the USS Buck when it was ambushed by German U-boat 616 on Oct. 9, 1943.
- Robert Patrick Shellem, 18, was from the Venice Park neighborhood of Atlantic City and was born, raised and educated in the resort. He died on April 28, 1968, at 19 in the vicinity of Quang Nam in Vietnam when he pushed two team members out of the way of a live grenade but was killed by it.
- George Peter Nestor graduated from Atlantic City Trade School in 1937. He spent 28 years in the Army and ended his career as a major. He was an Atlantic City firefighter. He died at age 90 on Nov. 22, 2006.
- Francis X. McCormac, who has lived for the past 16 years in Ocean City, is 99. He landed at Omaha Beach seven days after D-Day in June 1944 in France. He spent time in Germany and participated in the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944 in Belgium.
- Ernest J. Tarsitano was born and raised in the inlet neighborhood of Atlantic City. He joined the Ventnor City Fire Department in 1985 and currently lives in Galloway Township. Tarsitano, who was a retired firefighter at the time, saved the life of 72-year-old Roderick Cormier, who was semiconscious in a burning Galloway motel room, in 2018.