

The Worcester Fire and Memorial Service: Behind the Scenes

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Day 1

The December 3, 1999 retirement party for Needham Firefighter Tom Welch had been going along well. Tom was retiring after many years of service to his town and firefighters at the local and state level. Presentations had been made and the evening meal was being served. The room at Florian Hall in Boston, home to Boston Firefighters Local 718, was filled with over 250 guests, many of them firefighters from across the state. At the same time some 50 miles west of Boston, Box 1438 was being struck for a building fire at 266 Franklin Street in Worcester.

As the evening went on at Florian, an observant person would notice that quite a few of the firefighters kept looking at their pagers. They subscribe to a service that notifies them of large fires in Massachusetts. What they read was not good. The fire in Worcester had gone to five alarms and more importantly, there were firefighters missing. It was 7:00 p.m.

Quiet whispers became loud voices. There were six firefighters unaccounted for and the worse was presumed. The President of the Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts (PFFM), Bob McCarthy, sought out the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) 3rd District Vice-President, Mike Mullane to brief him on the fire. In their roles, McCarthy represents all Massachusetts union firefighters and Mullane all union firefighters in New England. The missing firefighters were members of one of New England's strongest IAFF locals, Local 1009 of Worcester.

Many members of the PFFM's newly formed Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team (CISD) were also present at Florian Hall. President McCarthy met with the team's coordinator, Cambridge firefighter John "Spike" Lawless, and the decision was made to send the team at once to Worcester. This decision was key as events later that night would prove out. It was now 8:00 p.m.

The retirement party continued with constant updates being phoned in to President McCarthy. Then the call they did not want to come came.

McCarthy told Mullane they were requested to respond to the fire scene in Worcester at once. Joining the duo was PFFM Secretary-Treasurer Ken Donnelly. As one of Boston Fire's Public Information Officers and an Executive Board member of Local 718, I volunteered to drive as my BFD vehicle had the necessary lights and siren that would be needed to get through the roadblocks that surely would now be in place. It was 10:10 p.m.

On the trip up, Mullane started making phone calls. He contacted the Executive Assistant to General President Alfred Whitehead of the IAFF in Washington, D.C., Harold Schaitberger. It was agreed to get IAFF Health & Safety Director Richard Duffy and IAFF Communications Director George Burke to Worcester as soon as possible. Another key decision that would prove valuable in the days to come.

The team from Boston arrived in Worcester at 10:45 p.m. McCarthy, Mullane and Donnelly were briefed by the PFFM's CISD Team. Next, they conferred with the State Fire Marshal, Stephen Coan; Worcester Fire Chief Dennis Budd, PFFM Vice-President (7th District) Ron Armstrong and Worcester IAFF Local 1009 President Frank Raffa. It was confirmed that six Worcester firefighters were missing since 7:00p.m.

The fire continued to burn. This massive five story windowless building had flames reaching high into the sky. The danger of its walls falling forced adjacent Interstate 290, the main egress to and from Worcester, to shut down. The roof and upper floors collapsed. Large heavy stream appliances surrounded the city block. It was a scene that would continue for days.

It was time to meet with the families of the six missing firefighters.

Coordinated efforts between the Worcester Fire and Police Departments had the families taken to St. Stephen's School. There, members of the PFFM's CISD Team had secured classrooms for each family. The six missing firefighters had a combined 17 children. Five were married. The families silently filed into the school being escorted by Worcester firefighters, chaplains and friends. Eyes were red and some filled with tears. Young children puzzled by what was happening. It was 11:00p.m.

Chief Budd, Marshal Coan, PFFM VP Armstrong, Local 1009 President Raffa together with the union officials from Boston made the short trip to St. Stephen's School. The family members were assembled into one of the larger classrooms. Clergy, City Officials and CISD members lined the walls. In the most difficult and emotional meeting I have ever witnessed as a firefighter, Chief Budd told the families that their husbands, sons, brothers and fathers have been missing for several hours and there was little chance for survival. It was midnight.

Over the course of the next few hours, the PFFM's CISD Team would assist the families and just as important, the Worcester firefighters. They rose to the occasion and for those, who ever doubted the need for CISD, this night they had their answer. The decision several hours earlier to start the Team to Worcester was the right call.

We returned to the fire scene and stayed until 2:30 a.m. It was obvious that the fire would burn for some time. We decided that we needed to get home, get some sleep and get back to Worcester as early as possible. On the ride back to Boston, we started to map out the coming days. We knew what we had to do. We also knew we would need more help.

Day 2

Saturday, December 4th found us all back in Worcester by 8:00 a.m. The fire was still burning and no recovery operation could begin until it was knocked down. The Worcester firefighters were working without sleep and on pure adrenaline. The whole department was there. No one was going anywhere as long as the six were still missing. We received word that Governor Paul Cellucci would be coming to the scene. He did not want any press around. He just wanted to quietly meet with the families and the Worcester firefighters.

State Fire Marshal Steve Coan put into operation a little used plan that over the next two weeks would provide fire companies from throughout Massachusetts to cover the City of Worcester. Task forces of up to 15 units would make the trip to Worcester.

The phone calls were coming at a fast pace. Many offers of help. Boston Mayor Tom Menino called Mike Mullane to offer all the resources of the City. Rich Duffy and George Burke from the IAFF were already on a plane to Boston. Everyone wanted to do something. At one point, Firefighter Butch King of Canton Fire showed up at the scene to report that he had already draped the twelve Worcester firehouses with black bunting. No one asked Butch to do this, but it needed to be done. Those who understand firefighters were not surprised by Butch's actions. The PFFM CISD Team had little sleep and the need to start thinking about rotating shifts was put in motion. By the end of this day, catering for the working firefighters had been set up, lighting plants put in place and an area for the families to observe the search established. Chief Budd made the decision that the recovery operation would not stop. He also called for a large crane to get at the seat of the fire and to start removing the collapsed floors.

We set up Operations at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Worcester and blocked off 45 rooms to start. (Author's note: When the term *we* is used, it refers to members of the IAFF, PFFM and the Worcester and Boston local unions) The hotel was only too accommodating. Over the next several days, they would provide meeting space and unlimited coffee and sandwiches with their compliments. This Operations Center was put in place to start thinking and planning for the funerals and/or a memorial service. It had nothing to do with the active fire scene.

Day 3

Sunday, December 5th started with a meeting in the Operations Center of the Worcester and Boston union officials together with Rich Duffy and George Burke of the IAFF National office in Washington, D.C. The Boston team consisted of Ralph Dowling, Mike Walsh and myself. We head up a team of Boston Local 718 members who through a Special Operations section of the BFD assist in large-scale logistic incidents. The Worcester union already had in place a Funeral Committee headed up by Mark Whalen that really had its act together. Both groups started a dialogue with Duffy and Burke about a memorial/funeral service. Both Rich and George have had a great deal of experience in multiple firefighter fatality incidents and were instrumental in setting up memorial services in Los Angeles, Seattle, Kansas City and Stockton, California.

The options were discussed with the consensus leaning towards one funeral service in the Worcester Centrum on Thursday, December 9th if the families agreed. The Worcester Centrum was the obvious choice. It can hold 14,000 people and had the date available. At this time we had no idea that the recovery of the six missing firefighters would extend far into next week.

Next up, we traveled to Worcester City Hall to meet with the Mayor, City Manager and other city officials. This meeting set the tone for the coming days. We briefed the city on plans for one large funeral service with the possibility of making it a memorial service instead. The city was on board. They pledged total cooperation. During this meeting, word came from the fire scene that the first firefighter had been recovered. He would be later identified as Timothy Jackson of Ladder 2.

We then went to the fire scene. We had a need to meet with the families to discuss what we would like to do. It was agreed if just one family did not want the one large funeral, we would then switch to a memorial service with six separate funerals either before or after the service.

A tent had been set up for the immediate families of the six missing firefighters. We entered the tent and Rich Duffy gave the four families that were present the details of what we were suggesting to do. All it took was one widow to point out to us that the Centrum is a very popular place for sporting events and concerts. She questioned if her children could ever go into the Centrum again knowing their father had been buried from there. Her simple logic addressed what we had missed and the memorial service was then proposed. The four families agreed to a memorial service on Thursday. Now we had to reach the two families that were not present. We needed all families to agree. We needed the liaisons.

Within 24 hours of this fire, a decision was made by Bob McCarthy and Mike Mullane to have the Worcester union assign a liaison to each family. This person would be a Worcester firefighter who knew the family personally and more importantly, was trusted by the family. The liaisons would become vital in dealing with the families. It was paramount to keep the families involved with all aspects of not just the planned memorial service but also the recovery efforts at the fire scene. These six liaisons would go on to work 14 straight days with little time off assisting the families.

All six families agreed to the Memorial Service. George Burke gave it to the Mayor of Worcester, Ray Mariano, to announce to the press at the Sunday 4:00 p.m. briefing.

Those of us from Boston Fire were given unlimited time off from our regular jobs by Boston Fire Commissioner Martin E. Pierce, Jr. Commissioner Pierce had also offered his support and advice to Chief Budd both in person and by phone since the incident started.

Logistically, several of us checked into the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The commute back and forth to Boston was taking too much time.

Sunday evening we met at the hotel to start in earnest planning the Memorial Service. The Worcester firefighters wanted a procession that would take those marching past the two firehouses where the six worked. This route would run 1.5 miles and was fairly straight. Rich Duffy laid out the Memorial Service. Using the IAFF's experience in these matters, Rich stated that there were four elements needed for a successful service; clergy, music, elected officials and firefighters. Apparatus in the procession was not a concern, as it is not used in the Northeast as it is in other parts of the country. We met with the Worcester Fire Department officials and they gave us total control over the Memorial Service. They, after all, still had five missing firefighters that had to be recovered.

As the PIO for Boston Fire, I had a pretty good relationship with the Boston media. I teamed up with George Burke and together we coordinated the press with respect to the Memorial Service. In addition, we helped out at the fire scene with the Worcester Fire PIO's. We worked to stay as far in the background as possible while offering advice and support. The Boston television stations (6 total) together with the two Boston dailies and the *Worcester Telegram* were covering this incident around the clock. Based on our experience with the Boston media, we fully expected at least one station to broadcast the Memorial Service live from the Centrum. Little did we know what was to come.

Day 4

Monday, December 6th started with what would become the routine for the coming week. We met at the hotel at 9:00 a.m. Ralph Dowling of Boston would chair these meetings. Ralph along with Mike Walsh had worked on many incidents together. Ralph's rolodex of contacts throughout the State was invaluable. Police escorts, bus transportation, radios, air support-you name it- Ralph had a source. He started with a task list and assignments were given out. This person would work on catering for 10,000 after the Memorial Service, that person on parking for the 15,000 who would march, this person on bagpipe bands, that person on a sound system and so on. The Worcester Local had secured some Nextel cell phones that also serve as two-way radios. Again, another important item that was critical to a successful operation.

Next up, it was back to City Hall to brief the city. Talk centered on closing schools on Thursday, available parking lots, police escorts, street closings, etc. The city had all the key decision-makers present, which made things go smoothly. We met with the General Manager of the Worcester Centrum, Sandy Dunn. She was a pro. Nothing we requested was met with a no. The Centrum was booked for the next three nights, but Sandy and her staff would make it work.

George Burke and Rich Duffy kept in constant contact with their Washington office. What they were hearing was there was strong interest from the White House with the tragedy unfolding in Worcester. In fact, Vice-President Al Gore at one point called Mike Mullane on his cell phone for an update. His concern and support was genuine and much appreciated.

Monday evening, we went up to the Centrum to do a walk through. In a most surreal setting, we toured the Centrum during a sold-out World Wrestling Federation show. Fans were screaming in the background, wrestlers body-slammings and our group going over

stage placement, seating and sound systems. The WWF, by the way, visited the firehouse behind the Centrum and quietly dropped off checks totaling over \$20,000.00 for the firefighters fund.

Day 5

Tuesday morning, the dynamics of the Memorial Service changed. We did our usual 9:00 a.m. meeting. It was interrupted, however, by George Burke telling us that the White House had just confirmed that President Clinton would attend. Ralph continued the meeting going over the procession logistics. I left to chair another meeting with the media.

Over at the fire scene, Bob McCarthy and Mike Mullane were providing the leadership needed to support this incident. They gave steady guidance to Worcester Local 1009 President Frank Raffa and his Executive Board. Most of these guys had not slept in a couple of days. They would not leave the scene while some of their brothers were missing. There were so many details that had to be addressed. Early into this incident, Mike and Bob had a couple of firefighters from the PFFM go to the family liaisons to get the names of the missing firefighters' dentists. A small detail that would help identify the firefighters once they were recovered. Bob and Mike were like a tag team. One would meet and talk with the District Attorney, the Chief Medical Examiner for the State, the Secretary of Public Safety for the State - just about anyone who had some kind of jurisdiction, then the other would follow up, making the same point. They were relentless in their quest to protect the rights of the firefighters and the families.

Operational support turned the fire scene into a small city. Hundreds of volunteers were feeding the firefighters around the clock, cases of socks and gloves arrived, photo id's were being given out, heated tents with cots were set up, search dogs brought in, cranes working non-stop gently lifting off the floors of the fire building. All this and the wait for the families continued.

On this Tuesday, December 7, 1999, Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci together with the State Fire Marshal Steve Coan were to preside over the annual Massachusetts Firefighter of the Year Awards Ceremony in downtown Boston. Of course, the ceremony was cancelled. In fact, a couple of the firefighters to be honored were now working to find the missing firefighters. They were part of Boston Fire's highly trained Collapse-Rescue Unit.

The media had decided that they would televise the procession and Memorial Service live. Not one or two stations, but all six Boston stations plus Worcester cable. They also asked for commentators for their coverage. They informed us that most of them would be on the air in Worcester from 9:00a.m. to 1:00p.m. We encouraged them and promised cooperation from our end. We did a site visit of the Centrum and walked the procession route to agree on camera positions. In the end, CNN, MSNBC and Fox joined these stations. What a tribute to our profession and the six Worcester firefighters. I handled most of the Boston media with George Burke handling the national press. The Today Show and all the other network morning and evening newscasts kept George quite busy.

The Worcester Fire officials were most accommodating in dealing with the press. Under emotionally draining circumstances, they met at designated hours several times a day, even if there was no news. As the week wore on, they earned the respect and admiration of the members of the media.

Back at the hotel, we had our first meeting with the White House advance team. They came in, stated that their instructions were to work with us, and asked us our plans. Rich Duffy went over the program and timetable. All would need to be signed off on by the Secret Service, but from what was presented, it looked good.

We next took a walk over to the Centrum. Seating, security, site lines, camera positions and staging were discussed. Rich would negotiate with the Secret Service as to how many could sit behind the stage, next to the stage, etc. The one logistic that the Secret Service insisted on was that everyone entering the Centrum would need to pass through a metal detector. I would layout to the White House Communications person the program as far as the ceremonial aspects of it. These were things such as bagpipes, the playing of taps, the presentation of medals & flags, etc. He knew the size of the press group that accompanies the President and what generally works for them. In the end, our common agendas allowed us to all work great together.

The conference room at the hotel was a scene of organized chaos. George Burke was working with those who would speak at the Memorial Service, helping put their thoughts into words. Ralph and Mike were working the phones dealing with color guards and transportation issues at the same time briefing the many firefighters that were checking into the hotel. Over in the corner, Worcester Local 1009 President Frank Raffa, in his bunker gear fresh from the fire scene, sat with Mike Mullane and wrote what he wanted to say on a yellow legal pad. He later would be summoned back with the discovery of a second missing firefighter, Jay Lyons.

Ken Donnelly had put together a Memorial Service Program book that would have bio's of each of the six firefighters, photos and the list of speakers and music. He was having 20,000 printed with an absolute go to print deadline of Wednesday at 8:00 a.m. It was midnight and Rich Duffy was still working on the final program. He would continue to receive calls from Kenny throughout the night. It went to print at noontime on Wednesday. The printing company turned this six-page program around and delivered it to Kenny with less than 12 hours to spare. It came out great and the entire job was donated.

Day 6

Wednesday found the activity at the fire scene heightened. There was a real sense of urgency among the firefighters to recover the remaining four. No one wanted them still missing while the Memorial Service went on Thursday. We briefed all those who needed it about the Memorial service plans.

IAFF General President Al Whitehead and Executive Assistant Harold Schaitberger were also at the fire scene. It was important for President Whitehead to be there. He met with the Chief, the families, members of the Worcester Local, the PFFM and the hundreds of

IAFF members that were working the scene. While there, they received a call from Vice-President Al Gore's staff that he indeed was coming to Worcester for the service. The Vice-President and the IAFF have a long history together and in fact the IAFF was the first major labor organization to endorse Gore.

Ralph Dowling, Mike Walsh and the Worcester crew were at the hotel working the finer details of the operation. The logistics were amazing, but doable. Ralph was coordinating the use of over 100 buses, 50 police motorcycles, staging areas for thousands of firefighters, the pickup of the families, the State Police buglers for the service, etc. The media attention had made this a major national story. We were expecting that there would be 15,000 firefighters for this service.

Mike Walsh, it should be noted, is assigned to Boston's Ladder 17. It is one of the Collapse-Rescue Units that were working at the scene. Mike would work his shift searching for the missing firefighters, then come over to the hotel, shower, then go to work on logistics.

At their request, we took the members of the White House staff over to the fire scene. These were people who have traveled the world with the President and have seen it all. They were amazed by what they saw. The human drama before them left them awestruck.

One aspect of this tragic incident that we came to rely on was the Internet. Most of us surf the web and have a casual relationship with it. There are some sites that are well known in firefighting circles that we call up to get the latest in news. George Burke took the lead in keeping not only the IAFF's site updated but others as well. The PFFM's Ken Donnelly and Kevin O'Brien worked to make sure their site had the latest in travel arrangements and hotels available. These sites were setting records for the number of hits they received. In the comment section of the PFFM's site, it would go on to record over 70 pages of comments, with 6-10 comments per page. Firehouse.com received over 100,000 hits from all over the world.

Once my cell phone number was given out to the media, the calls were non-stop. The more the media saw of the overwhelming support of the Worcester firefighters and their families, the more they called with requests. Once word that both the President and Vice-President were coming, this Memorial Service escalated to an event that none of us had ever worked. A television station from Albany, NY wanted to know where they could park their truck. A station from New Haven wanted the procession route. CNN wanted three interviews set up for Thursday morning live at 7:10 a.m., 7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. and on and on. Boston station WHDH called with a donation of two large Jumbotron televisions for in front of the Centrum and at the fire scene. The Centrum site was no problem, as all the streets would be closed. As for the one at the fire scene, I had some doubts as to whether it was appropriate. I called Mike Mullane at the scene, talked it over with him and we agreed that Chief Budd would have to sign off on it. He did and we placed it into position at 1:00 a.m. Thursday morning.

A final meeting came at 9:00p.m.and we met with the White House and Secret Service staffs at the Centrum for what they call the Countdown meeting. Let's just say their attention to detail is unmatched. It is not often that both the President and Vice-President appear together outside of Washington. Rich gave the White House staff the final list of those who would be on stage. One item that had slipped through the cracks was that no one had told the choir and orchestra that they needed to be on site at 6:a.m. for the Secret Service "sweep" of their instruments. The choir director took my call at 11:00 p.m. He basically told me it was past the point where he could contact the orchestra and also that no one had gotten back to him on transportation logistics. A quick call to Ralph took care of the buses. As for the "sweep" of instruments, it was decided that we would need some flexibility from the Secret Service in the morning.

When the meeting was over, Rich, George, Ralph, Mike and myself received our "pins". These are lapel pins that would allow us to move everywhere we needed to be on Thursday. They signaled to the Secret Service that we had clearance to be backstage, on stage, basically, anywhere the President was. Most of us hit our beds at between 2 to 3 a.m. The White House staff would pull an all-nighter. It was just the way they worked when time runs out.

One final note about Wednesday night. There was a professional hockey game at the Centrum that delayed setting up for the Memorial Service until midnight.

Day 7. The Memorial Service

The first crisis call came my way at 4:45 a.m. I had been sleeping for 2½ hours. Ron Caron of WHDH-TV Boston, who was coordinating the pool television coverage, was having a problem with the police placing a camera truck at an agreed upon location along the procession route. I went to the scene and worked it out with the police. Next, it was on to the Centrum. The White House staff was busy positioning the chairs onstage. They decide who sits next to the President and Vice-President. Others were making sure the sound, lighting and camera positions were correct. Rich Duffy was busy putting name cards on the chairs of the immediate families. Who made them up? Ken Donnelly printed them out at 3:00 a.m. The large 3'x5' photos of the six firefighters were delivered. Who made them? One of the Worcester firefighters took the small standard size photos we had and got a friend at Budweiser to blow them up. The six Worcester helmets with the company devices on the front? Rich Duffy had them flown in from somewhere. The flags that were presented to the families needed to be correctly folded. How? We saw three firefighters from someplace sitting in the Centrum. Job done. All the little details were falling into place. What you could not see was the tremendous effort from everyone.

I was called outside where the police ordered the main satellite truck moved. This truck was parked immediately next to the entrance the President's motorcade would use, but three feet closer than it was told to park. The truck would be providing all the video from inside to everyone else. The problem was a miscalculation when parking the truck. When raised, the satellite dish was hitting the top of the Centrum and no signal getting out. I sought out the Secret Service Agent-in Charge. The issue was resolved when the Agent coordinating the motorcade signed off on it.

Ralph and Mike were outside setting up the procession. We all had figured that we would get 15-20,000 firefighters in Worcester. The signs were starting to show that we had lowballed our estimate. The staging area was filling up fast. Amtrak donated special trains from Boston and New York that filled up in a couple of hours. Bus after bus was arriving. Nova Scotia, Cleveland, Cape Cod, Vermont - they came from everywhere. The weather was perfect. Along the procession route, the people of Worcester had taken their Mayor's advice to honor firefighters by viewing the procession. There were thousands of spectators lining the streets, at some points six deep. No one will ever forget the schoolchildren. Their homemade signs offering support and comfort to all firefighters left an indelible mark on all of us.

We had decided that the main focal point of the procession for the media would be in front of the Central Street Firehouse. It was here that we set up the two Worcester ladder trucks with a 15'x25' American flag. We originally figured six television camera positions at this location. We ended up with twenty. The Parks Department provided a cherry picker for a camera position that we set up right in the middle of the street. Another example of people doing little things to make this day work.

Inside, I called down to the staging area for 42 members of honor guards to meet me backstage. They would be placed into position as a backdrop to the stage. When the honor guard members arrived, instead of 42 members, there were 42 full honor guards of three to ten members each. We ended up placing them around the Centrum at the loge level. From this group, I asked for twelve volunteers to work in front of the stage as Honor Guards for each fallen firefighter. They would have to stay at parade rest for up to two hours, looking at the families. We ended up with six from Hyannis Fire and several other towns.

Outside, the firefighters were passing through the metal detectors with no problem. Ralph and Mike were monitoring the situation and reporting the crowds were extremely heavy.

The seating diagram had been worked out between Rich Duffy and the White House. We had 14,000 seats to fill. We also had Worcester firefighter's families, elected officials, union officials, clergy and the immediate families of the six firefighters needed inside the Centrum. It broke down as follows: 800 members of the families of the six firefighters, 2,600 members of the Worcester firefighter's families, 100 members of the clergy, 500 elected officials, union officials and assorted dignitaries and 10,000 firefighters.

The service started at 11:40 a.m. It was unmatched in its dignity. It was remarkable for its simplicity. It was memorable for its pageantry. When the bagpipers began the playing of Amazing Grace, without a word said, everyone stood. All the speakers' remarks addressed different elements. Some spoke to the immediate families, others to the firefighting community. Most were especially moved by Senator Ted Kennedy's reading of a firefighters poem.

We called outside to the staging area to see how many firefighters they thought had marched. We were informed that there were still firefighters waiting to march.

Over at the fire scene, crews continued the search for Tom Spencer, Jerry Lucey, Paul Brotherton and Joe McGuirk. Catching glances at the billboard sized television, they did not stop, only pausing during the playing of taps to remove their helmets, place their hand over their hearts and say a quiet prayer.

Aftermath

The choir got inside with no problem and was terrific. They sounded great and were one of the unexpected highlights of the service. It turned out that we had roughly 30,000 firefighters in Worcester, making this Memorial Service the largest firefighter memorial service ever in the United States. Of course there were glitches in the day, but only a few of us know what they were.

In the end, it was because of hundreds of people doing their jobs that the Memorial Service was deemed a success. It was because bus drivers reported to work on time and carried out their assignments, because the stagehands at the Centrum turned the hall from a hockey rink to an auditorium in a couple of hours, because the printing company met their deadlines, because the caterers showed up at 6:00 a.m. to start making sandwiches, because television crews worked without sleep to bring the world the pictures, because the people of Worcester joined together to make it work. An awful lot of people cared and it showed.

We wanted the families of Paul Brotherton, Jerry Lucey, Tim Jackson, Tom Spencer, Joe McGuirk and Jay Lyons' to know that their loved ones lives meant something.

We wanted firefighters working their shifts in firehouses around the world, watching the Memorial Service on CNN, to be proud of their profession.

In the coming days, the four missing firefighters would be recovered. The first funeral was on Saturday, December 11th and then one each day the next Monday thru Friday.

This fire in Worcester did more to raise the awareness of firefighters and what they do than any other single event I can remember. For once, the country had faces and families to put with the sacrifice firefighters make everyday. During one four-hour period on Thursday, December 9, 1999, the world stopped to honor all firefighters. I hope the families of Tim, Jay, Tom, Jerry, Paul and Joe understand how much their loved ones did for us, and continue to do. They shall never be forgotten.