



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 8, 2014

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

No. 472

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT FDNY'S 107th ANNUAL
MEMORIAL SERVICE**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I want to thank Chief Gala for presiding over this ceremony and so many other important moments in this department.

It's humbling to be here. I mean, look at this monument – it has been here for years, somberly reminding us of what people do, their bravery, their perseverance, the dangers they face. It's important that we come back here time and time again to remember, to respect, to appreciate all those who came before. It's humbling because their example reminds us of what we have to aspire to be. It's been 107 years – 107 years recognizing sacrifice and heroism at this site. We gather with heavy hearts, but we also gather with pride in what these heroes have done. We marvel at their courage. We marvel at their professionalism. We marvel at the strength of the FDNY and the EMS – that has been part of history, that is stronger than ever today.

But we're here also for the family, the loved ones, for the friends of those we've lost, to let them know that we will be with you always. FDNY has an extraordinary tradition. As many people say, this is a second family you join. It's just as intensely felt, just as committed as the family you grew up in. FDNY stands by all its men and women and all their family for the long haul – that is part of this extraordinary tradition.

I want to thank the leaders of this extraordinary department – Dan Nigro, our commissioner; Edward Kilduff, our Chief of Department; Robert Turner, our First Deputy Commissioner; James Esposito, our Chief of Operations; and Abdo Nahmod, our Chief of the EMS – for their extraordinary leadership.

I want to thank those who represent the men and women of this agency through their unions – James Lemonda, President of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association; James Slevin, Vice President of the Uniformed Firefighters Association; Vincent Variale, President of the EMS Officers Union; Izzy Miranda, President the Uniformed EMT's, Paramedics, & Fire Inspectors; and Debra Cali, President of the EMS Superior Officers Association. I thank them all for what they do every day to support the men and women who do this incredibly important work.

I want to thank also the elected officials who have joined with us in support and respect for this department.

Today we gather to remember four brave men – four brave men who we will always remember, who gave their lives in the last year.

It begins with Lieutenant Gordon Matthew Ambelas. Last July, a fire broke out on the 19th floor of a Williamsburg high-rise. FDNY and EMS rushed to the scene. As was Matt's habit and his customs and his beliefs, he led without fear. He led with courage. He led members of Williamsburg's Ladder 119 into the blaze, to search for survivors, to search for people in danger – and he made the ultimate sacrifice carrying out his duty.

We lost him at the age of 40 – truly a hero, truly an example of everything that people in this department aspire to. A proud 14-year FDNY veteran, he served during 9/11, he served during Hurricane Sandy. In May of this very year, he saved the life of a seven-year-old boy who was about to be crushed in a roll-up gate. There's a young man walking the streets of this city today because Matt saved him. And all that will happen thereafter – that young man has children and grandchildren – it's because Matt Ambelas was there to save the day. He is a great loss. First and foremost, this loss is deeply felt by his family and his friends, but it's a loss we as a city feel and we as a department feel.

We commemorate the legacy as well today of EMT Luis de Peña of Station 13 in Washington Heights – a decorated 18-year-veteran. On 9/11 and the days and weeks following, he spent countless hours at Ground Zero. Regardless of the danger, regardless of the struggle, he braved the toxic clouds of dust to aid in the rescue and recovery. He put everyone else first – continued to serve the city until his health failed him. This is a reminder that we all feel. We know the effects of 9/11 continue for so many people to this day – and we must stand by them.

We're here to honor EMS Lieutenant Walter Nelson, Station 31 in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. A 32-year veteran, extraordinary term of service – he died suddenly earlier this year. They inspired his children to serve. His son is following in his footsteps as an EMT, his daughter is a teacher – the family living out his belief and his commitment to others. The whole family believes in serving – his wife as well is an administrator at the Department of Education. This is a family that exemplifies everything good about New York City.

Finally, Firefighter John Monteverde, Engine 159 in Staten Island – also, an extraordinary lifetime of service – 31-year veteran, highly decorated, cited four times for bravery, served during 9/11, and lost in a fatal accident this year while reporting for duty.

Our hearts go out to all the members of the families here today. We can only imagine the pain that you felt, but we need you to know that we will stand by you. We need you to know how much we honor your loved ones who served with such extraordinary distinction. And we think today – 107 years – we think of all the firefighters, EMT's, and paramedics who gave their lives throughout history. We're linked to them. We won't forget their memory as well. Their actions continue to inspire us.

All of them stared down fear and danger and put others first. All of them were selfless. And it's a reminder, as the great quote from Nelson Mandela on the topic of courage – he said courage is “not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.” The men we honor today triumphed over fear in the name of all they believed in – and those, over these 107 years, have done it time and time again, reminding us again of what we must aspire to – the example they set for FDNY, the example they set for EMS, the example they set for all of us. On behalf of all New Yorkers, I thank them and I thank everyone assembled here today who serves our city. I thank you for your service and your dedication. Thank you for the heroism that we see every single day and we honor. Thank you.

[Applause]

###