



sanitation

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Remembering the Fallen: New York City Department of Sanitation Unveils 'Forever Strongest' Sculpture Honoring its Essential Workers Lost to COVID-19 Pandemic

The New York City Department of Sanitation, the world's largest municipal sanitation agency, today unveiled its permanent memorial sculpture, known as *Forever Strongest*, honoring members of the Department who lost their lives to the COVID-19 pandemic. DSNY – whose employees are known as *New York's Strongest* for their work ensuring a clean, safe, and healthy city – has suffered nine confirmed COVID-19 fatalities. Over 20% of the Department's approximately 9,500 employees have tested positive for COVID-19 since March of 2020.

"This pandemic has brought untold challenges to our City and to our Department. DSNY has been there every step of the way keeping New Yorkers safe and healthy. Today we honor and remember the nine friends, colleagues, and family members we have lost along the way. This statue means we will never forget them and their patriotic service during our city's darkest hours," said **Edward Grayson, Commissioner of the Department of Sanitation**.

"People from across the country – and even the globe – donated to the Foundation's DSNY COVID-19 Fund," said **Julie Raskin, Executive Director of the Sanitation Foundation**, the official non-profit partner of DSNY. "These contributions helped us purchase PPE to protect our essential Sanitation workforce, from reusable masks to hand sanitizer and wipes to high-visibility hats for the pre-dawn hours. In addition, they allowed us to commission this important sculpture."

Forever Strongest is the first permanent, free-standing memorial to victims of the COVID-19 pandemic in the City of New York. Made from stainless steel, concrete and rebar, this enduring meditation in steel weighs approximately 750 pounds, and stands at three feet wide and approximately 10 feet high.

This memorial is particularly meaningful to Sanitation, as it was conceptualized and crafted by a Department employee, who was commissioned to forge it by the Sanitation Foundation. Bernard Klevickas is an Iron Shop Worker and Machinist, who earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts with honors from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His works have graced the entrances of the Armory Art Show and the New Museum and have been featured at the City Reliquary Museum.

To produce this meaningful and enduring work of art, Klevickas opted for 316L stainless steel, a medical-grade metal, for its durability and versatility. This piece is comprised of a column, vessel, shroud, and bird and set upon rebar-reinforced concrete. Through his fabrication processes, the steel elements will each develop a different patina over time.

“Reflecting upon the loss of our essential workers, I began with a shortened Greek-style column to symbolize their lives cut too short. As an artist, I leave the other elements and totality of the work open to each viewer's interpretation,” **Klevickas** said. Some people may view a dove as a protector, shrouding a lost loved one. Others may see the bird as a spirit, liberating lost colleagues.

The statue will take a “tour” of DSNY garages around the city in the coming months before being installed in its permanent home.

“I want to thank all of you who have gathered here today to remember and honor those members of the Sanitation Department that were unfortunate victims of the COVID-19 virus – the workers, supervisors, managers and the other members of the Department. It is a sad time because they are no longer with us, but it is also a time to remember the good times we enjoyed with them, and to give thanks to the men and women of this Department that proved once again that the citizens of the greatest City in the world, New York, can depend on us to provide the essential work necessary to keep this City going,” said **Harry Nespoli, President of the Uniformed Sanitationmen’s Association Local 831.**

“As we pause our daily schedules to memorialize the devastating events over this past year and remember those that we lost and those that are still sick from the Covid-19 Pandemic, once again this great city must remember and Never Forget! I along with all my members of Local 444, the Sanitation Officers Association, will Never Forget and will pray for all those that have been affected by this pandemic and for their grieving families. God bless them,” said **Joseph Mannion, President of SEIU NYC Local 444.**

“The members of Local 246 are essential, and they worked hard throughout the pandemic to keep the DSNY fleet moving. While the end is in sight, sadly, far too many of them are not here to see it. This memorial will help ensure we never forget their sacrifice,” said **Joseph Colangelo, President of SEIU NYC Local 246.**

The nine Sanitation employees confirmed to have lost their lives due to COVID-19 are:

- Ali Ali, Sanitation Worker, Queens East 7
- Raymond Copeland, Sanitation Worker, Queens East 12
- Rickey Dowtin, Jr., Sanitation Enforcement Agent, Manhattan
- Michael Geraci, Auto Mechanic, Queens Borough Repair
- Francisco Nunez, Auto mechanic, Manhattan and Bronx Repair Shop
- Quebiy Pigott, Sanitation Worker, Manhattan 5
- Iqbal Shaikh, Clerical Associate, Queens West Borough Office
- Paul Santoro, Sr., Auto Mechanic, Queens East 10
- Kevin Williams, Sanitation Worker, Bronx 5

DSNY encourages all eligible New Yorkers to get vaccinated to protect themselves and those around them. Vaccination is safe, easy and free. New Yorkers can find a vaccine site at vaccinefinder.nyc.gov.

About the New York City Department of Sanitation

The Department of Sanitation (DSNY) keeps New York City healthy, safe and clean by collecting, recycling and disposing of waste, cleaning streets and vacant lots, and clearing snow

and ice. The Department operates 59 district garages and manages a fleet of more than 2,000 rear-loading collection trucks, 450 mechanical brooms and 705 salt spreaders. The Department clears litter, snow and ice from approximately 6,500 miles of City streets and removes debris from vacant lots as well as abandoned vehicles from City streets.