NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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Prez pal in Bravest new world

By BRAD HUNTER

Retired firefighter Bob Beckwith became a symbol for a heartbroken but defiant nation when he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with President Bush at ground zero.

Now, almost a month later, the 69-year-old father of six is trying to return to the routines and pleasures of a life that, before the horrific attack on the World Trade Center, was average in every way.

But like everyone else, life has changed dramatically for the Baldwin, L.I., retiree.

"I guess I've become a symbol for the firefighters, but all I really am is just another face. You can put anyone's picture in my place, it's the same," he told The Post.

Beckwith, who spent nearly 28 years as a firefighter in Queens, went down to the WTC attack site to help out after seeing it on TV. He had just helped clear debris off a crushed firetruck when Bush arrived.

The president threw his arm around Beckwith and asked him to stay on the makeshift podium. The twin towers of courage were then seen around the world.

"People recognize me now and tell me their stories about the attack. Stories you just can't believe," he said sadly. "They seem to turn to me for comfort."

The tragedy has also stung the veteran firefighter.

"I lost a lot of buddies, and when you're a firefighter, you're always a brother," he said. "When you lose one, two, three guys, it hurts."

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