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Hero sarge said job was 'cop heaven'

By LARRY CELONA

Sgt. John Coughlin adored the NYPD and enjoyed being in the elite Emergency Service Unit so much he never took the lieutenant's test because he didn't want to leave "cop heaven."

But no matter how much he loved rescue work, it paled in comparison to his No. 1 job — being a father to his three daughters: Erin, 16, Tara, 13, and Kayla, 6.

"He would never say no to them," said Coughlin's wife, Pat, recounting how her husband of 20 years never missed a sports practice or dance recital or music lesson.

"To him, they were his three little princesses."

The three girls will join thousands of mourners today at memorial service at St. Boniface Church in Rockland County to pay tribute to Coughlin, one of 23 city cops missing at the World Trade Center.

Pat Coughlin, who will plans read a letter she wrote to her husband, says the 18-year veteran wouldn't want a flood of tears on his behalf.

"I don't want a bunch of people sitting around, crying. Everyone can pay their respects, and they can get up and go on with their lives," he once said.

"He'd much rather we laugh than cry," she said. "They used to call him an instigator at work. He used to like to stir things up, and then he would sit back and laugh."

A former Marine, Coughlin, 43, started dating his childhood pal Pat when he was home on leave in December 1978. A few years later, they got married, and he joined the Police Department a couple of years after that.

"John always wanted to be a cop, but he enjoyed the rescue end of it more than the rest. He always wanted to be in emergency service," Pat said.

Her husband was big and strong, and people were often intimidated on first meeting him. But Coughlin, who called everybody "lad," would soon put them at ease.

"He was a big teddy bear," Pat said.

On Sept. 11, Coughlin and Officer Stephen Driscoll raced to the Twin Towers with ESU Truck 4, paused to shake hands with the mayor and police commissioner, and then ran up the stairs. They were last seen on the 20th floor.

"I knew John was in there," said Pat, who waited all day by the phone for the call that would confirm her worst fear. "People needed to be saved. He wouldn't be any place else."

Since the disaster, Pat has found herself in a role that her husband would have liked — meeting police brass and politicians, even President Bush.

"I'm doing this for him," she said, then added, "He's probably up there having a good laugh."

These are the funerals and memorial services being held today for heroes who died in the World Trade Center terror attacks:

NYPD **Sgt. John Coughlin,** Emergency Service Squad 4. At 11 a.m., St. Boniface Church, 5 Willow Tree Road, Wesley Hills, N.Y.

FDNY **Firefighter Joseph Angelini, Jr.,** Ladder 4. At 11 a.m., Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 210 South Wellwood Ave., Lindenhurst, L.I.

FDNY **Firefighter John Ginley,** Engine 40. At 11 a.m., Saint Stephen The Martyr Roman Catholic Church, 75 Sanfordville Road, Warwick, N.Y.

Ground zero rites next Sunday

An interdenominational memorial service for the families of the more than 5,000 people dead or still missing from the World Trade Center attacks will be held next Sunday at ground zero, Mayor Giuliani announced yesterday.

Family members have visited the site in small groups since the Sept. 11 attacks but this will be the first time they will be allowed there en masse.

"We had always planned at some point to have a memorial there. We needed that right time, when it's open enough and safe enough and we think next Sunday is the right time," the mayor said.

For several hours next Sunday, the workmen who have been sifting through the rubble will pause.

The mayor said that recently at ground zero he met families who told him they were comforted by being there where their loved ones died and maybe are buried.

Frankie Edozien

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