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4 fallen Bravest remembered for valor

Hero's sister to join EMS

By DONALD BERTRAND, AUSTIN FENNER and ALISON GENDAR
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

Valor. Professional calm in the face of horror. Unwavering dedication. Four New York City firefighters were honored yesterday for the quiet dignity they brought to the dangerous job they loved.

For Alexander Santora, a retired FDNY chief, pain mingled with relief to be able to finally bury his 23-year-old son, Christopher.

An error by the medical examiner's office had mistakenly identified Christopher — a firefighter only since July — as one of his fallen comrades, Jose Guadalupe, 37.

The Guadalupe family held a funeral Oct. 1 and buried the body they thought was their son's. The Santoras were among the mourners. Both men had worked at Engine Co. 54, based in a midtown firehouse that lost 15 men in the Sept. 11 tragedy. The error was based on X-rays of a rare congenital condition on two vertebrae that both men shared, a "1-in-5 trillion chance," officials said.

Christopher Santora's body was disinterred last week, and yesterday hundreds came to give him a proper goodbye in a four-hour service at St. Rita's Catholic Church in Long Island City.

The elder Santora, amid joking remembrances of his son, acknowledged what he called the "bizarre twist" and thanked the firefighters who were still searching the World Trade Center wreckage for bodies.

"I salute you," the grieving father said from the pulpit, as he raised his hand to his forehead in salute. "We now have our son. Now we can put him to rest." Those in the crowd rose to their feet to clap.

Thirteen friends and family members shared memories of Santora yesterday in a ceremony that included the release of 16 white doves — one for each of the firehouse's missing plus one for all the other fallen. But it was one of Christopher Santora's four sisters, Kathleen, who gave her brother what could be the most lasting tribute.

"I am going to try to finish the job you started," she said, telling mourners of her plans to join Emergency Medical Services, a division of the FDNY.

"Watch over me, big brother," she said, "I need your help."

Grim discovery

Three days ago, rescue workers recovered the body of Firefighter Angel Juarbe Jr. at Ground Zero. He was found near the



CRAIG WARGA

DEDICATION Doves are released as family and friends mourn Firefighter Christopher Santora yesterday at St. Rita's church in Long Island City, Queens.

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Vista Hotel alongside one of his colleagues, Lt. Phil Petti.

The two had been racing to answer a Mayday call from another firefighter, injured when the first tower collapsed. Juarbe was telling the fallen firefighter that help was on the way when the second tower came crashing down, Fire Lt. Brenda Berkman said during a service at St. Roch's Catholic Church on Wales Ave. in the South Bronx.

"Everyone knows when they take this job, they may be called on and put in a position that would put their lives in jeopardy. Phil and Angel reacted just the way they should, which is to put other people ahead of themselves," Berkman said.

Juarbe had been memorialized a month ago. Yesterday, a bilingual funeral Mass was held in his honor. His flag-draped coffin was driven to the church atop Engine 306. Eight firefighters slowly marched his coffin into the church. Petti will be buried tomorrow.

By all accounts, Juarbe was having a fantastic summer. A tall and handsome man, he was an avid biker who would ride from his home in the South Bronx to his firehouse on W. 19th St. in Manhattan.

A fitness enthusiast, he would encourage his fellow firefighters to eat granola and drink fat-free milk. The single firefighter was a magnet for women, friends said, and fame flashed its spotlight on him this summer, as he won $300,000 and a Jeep Liberty as the finalist on a reality television show called "Murder in Smalltown X."

Profile in courage

Firefighter Lawrence Veling, a 15-year veteran of the FDNY, was the senior man on duty Sept. 11 at Engine Co. 235 in the Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

As the first plane struck, Veling understood the enormity of the situation. So, as he waited for the inevitable call to the scene, he tried, in his calm, level way, to prepare the younger firefighters for the danger they would face.

"His leadership role shined through that day," said Lt. John Cullen of Engine 235.

Veling told the crew to stay together because it was the kind of horrible fire where firefighters get hurt, Cullen said.

Veling, 44, was one of six firefighters from Engine 235 to die that day, Mayor Giuliani said at the service at the Resurrection Church in Gerritsen Beach, Brooklyn.

The mayor looked at Veling's wife, Diane, and their three children, Ryan, 8, Cynthia, 6, and Kevin, 3, when he said "Lawrence was part of a very proud firehouse from Brooklyn that made a very great sacrifice."

Called to duty

Robert Crawford, a 32-year Fire Department veteran, technically could have walked away from the dangerous job at any time. He had often talked about retiring, but in the end he just couldn't bring himself to do it.

So he was on the job Sept. 11 as usual, a firefighter at Safety Battalion 1 on Randalls Island. His remains were recovered from Ground Zero on Thanksgiving Day.

"We know that he is and was a noble and good and kind man who loved his wife and family dearly," said Msgr. Brian Callahan during a funeral Mass yesterday at St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Brooklyn. A memorial service had been held Nov. 10.

"We come together to sing the praise of a hero. Bob's story is one that fills all of us with tremendous pride," Callahan said.

When he wasn't at the fire station, Crawford, 62, was in his workshop in the garage behind his East Flatbush, Brooklyn, home or he was out raising money for St. Rose's Home on Jackson St., on the lower East Side.

The order of nuns there depend solely on donations to give aid to cancer victims in their last weeks of life. But despite raising thousands of dollars for St. Rose, Crawford was rarely in any of the group's photographs — he was too busy being the one taking the pictures.

"He was not one that sought the limelight for himself but he did his job," Callahan said. Crawford leaves five adult children, two of whom are police officers, and his wife Dorothea.

With Michael O. Allen and Helen Peterson

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