

NEW YORK POST

'911' COPS ON WALL OF FAME

By MURRAY WEISS and CHUCK BENNETT

If routine IT management wasn't slowing you down.



April 28, 2008 -- Eight city cops who succumbed to 9/11 dust-related illnesses will be memorialized on the NYPD's "Wall of Heroes" for officers killed in the line of duty - a poignant nod to their kin, who spent years battling City Hall over how the deaths should be classified.

The decision by Police Commissioner Ray Kelly to include the names of the fallen officers on the memorial at One Police Plaza will culminate May 7 in an emotional ceremony at which he and Mayor Bloomberg will preside.

"We are happy about it, but it's been a long battle," said Joseph Zadroga, whose son, Detective James Zadroga, died in January 2006 from lung disease after spending about 450 hours at Ground Zero.

For years, sickened officers and their families sparred with Bloomberg over whether their illnesses were caused by their logging hundreds of hours at the smoking pile of the World Trade Center and at the Fresh Kills landfill.

There are still about 3,000 related claims by police officers or their families that have yet to be resolved, according to lawyers.

"Little by little, the layers of denial are peeling away," said lawyer David Worby, who represents 8,000 first responders and recovery workers sickened after days toiling at the trade center site. "The city is no longer denying that a high percentage of people who spent a significant period of time there are sick."

Mayor Bloomberg vehemently fought paying out death benefits to relatives of Ground Zero responders, claiming it will cost the city too much money. Kelly, like many officials, had remained largely on the sidelines, awaiting more medical evidence.

The ceremony shows how far the city has come, supporters say.

Kelly, referring to the ceremony to honor the eight on the wall of "Names of Those of Who Died in Performance of Duty," said in a statement:

"Each of these eight individuals . . . assisted in rescue and recovery efforts. It is only fitting that they be recognized in this fashion."

Policemen's Benevolent Association head Patrick Lynch praised Kelly for adding the names.

"Had there been no attack, these officers would be alive today," Lynch said.

At the formal ceremony, police officers James Godbe, Thomas Brophy, Ronald Weintraub and Angelo Peluso and Detectives Zadroga, John Young, Kevin Hawkins and Robert Williamson will have their plaques unveiled.

Zadroga was the first to have his deadly illness "officially" linked to toxins inhaled at Ground Zero. His case prompted New York lawmakers to pass a bill awarding accidental-death benefits to relatives of afflicted Ground Zero responders. He and the others to be honored all died between 2004 and 2007 and had their deaths formally declared as having occurred in the line of duty.

"This is obviously very important to me and my children and Bob's family," said Maureen Williamson, who lost her detective husband, Robert, in May after a bout with pancreatic cancer.

murray.weiss@nypost.com

[Home](#)

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