



2009 Queen's Park Fallen Fire Fighters' Memorial Service

Good afternoon Your Honour, Deputy Premier Smitherman, Mr. Levac, special guests, Reverend King, family members, brother and sister fire fighters.

It is a distinct honour to welcome you to the annual Ontario fallen fire fighters' memorial ceremony. I have been privileged to stand before you in this same location every year since our inaugural ceremony on June 5, 2005 when we unveiled this beautiful symbol of respect.

Last year I described this memorial service as "exceptional" since it not only provided an opportunity for us to collectively pay tribute - but to stand tall and proud together - despite the heinous attempts to disgrace our monument and discredit the memories of our fallen comrades when our memorial was vandalized in May of last year.

Although those responsible for their cowardly acts have not been apprehended, I am tremendously proud that we have gathered today under the shadow of a beautifully restored memorial. Our monument stands tall, just as we did. I am confident that every member whose name is inscribed on these walls is looking down upon us today with an approving nod.

The flags that adorn this memorial are lowered to half mast each time a fire fighter in Ontario loses their life in the line of duty. Today we mark the ultimate sacrifice made by 28 brave fire fighters since our memorial service last October.

'Dying in the line of duty' is a sombre expression that evokes immediate respect and intense grief. Knowing that a fire fighter has given their life during the course of performing their job - immediately makes us stop and consider - what it must be like to be expected to lay down one's life while attempting to save another. Ours is a profession that consistently calls on ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

A death in the line of duty, by whatever means, is a profound loss that resonates throughout our extended family. It is a loss that many of us find difficult to explain and often impossible to accept.

I am pleased to see the number of families and fire fighters who are participating in our memorial service today. We pause to pay respect and remembrance to our spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, colleagues and friends – in fact all Ontario fire fighters today. This re-dedication of our monument will appropriately honour each of the 500 fire fighters whose names have been inscribed within these walls.

Last year I stated that “our steadfast resilience has sent a message that we will not be deterred in our obligation to properly memorialize our brothers and sisters who have died in the line of duty. We will do so with an appropriate tribute - free from the scars left by vandals.”

Today we can say that we have accomplished that goal. I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank those who contributed to rebuilding this honourable legacy. I would like to especially thank Brother Terry Colburn who personally administered every step of this emotional undertaking.

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to view this structure as it was being restored and I found myself attached in many ways, some very personally, to the names inscribed within these granite walls. The other day while visiting this monument, I found myself thinking about the people behind the names and the many acts of heroism that they committed.

Like the many fire fighters gathered here today, the brave fire fighters we are honouring also applied their dedication, accepted the risks, but ultimately and unfortunately these fire fighters made the supreme sacrifice. It is for these reasons and the knowledge that fire fighters exist within our society who are willing to risk their lives for complete strangers should duty call, that we erected this beautiful monument.

On behalf of the over 10,000 professional fire fighters across Ontario I extend our sincerest condolences, thoughts and prayers to the families of our fallen brothers and sisters. They deserve no less than to be honoured in this fashion.

God bless. To those fire fighters on duty today – stay safe.

Sincerely,

Fred LeBlanc,
President, Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association