

From Behind the Lens to the Front Lines

The Heroic Response of Studio Mechanics at Ground Zero

BY RICHARD LIEBERMAN
BOARD OF TRUSTEES, YWC CO-CHAIR

The morning of September 11th, 2001 was the same as any other day. Dan Mahoney as well as the rest of the office staff were at the old union hall on 48th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue. After the 1st plane hit the WTC Dan walked from the 52 office to the corner on 8th avenue where he saw a firetruck driven by Mike Lynch and recognized the rest of the firefighters on that truck. See, the firefighters at FDNY Engine 54/Ladder 4/Battalion 9 had regularly shaped at the hall and worked with us when we were busy. As they were driving off, Dan didn't know that was the last time he would see those men.

New York City faced a challenge unlike it has seen before. It launched a massive mobilization in rescue, recovery, and civic stabilization efforts. First responders, emergency personnel, and volunteers rushed to Ground Zero. At the same time, NYC mobilized vast medical, logistical, and military support. One issue NYC didn't account for, was the lack of electricity. All the power south of 14th street had been knocked out. The Fire Department and the Police had no rescue squads, no power, and needed all the help they could get. One thing the film community specialized in was providing power, lighting, and dust suppression. We sprung to action.

What Local 52 did as a membership in response was step up. James "Peaches" Dolan said of the matter *"I've been in business for a long time... but it was probably the proudest moments that I was ever to be a 52 man. We had so many people who volunteered. We had biggest gaffers, we had workers, we had grips, props, we had so many people, and everybody just did what they had to do."*

NYC went into a rescue mission for first two weeks after 9/11, asking for all help from everyone who can to save anyone they could. John Ford led the coordination of our resources from the union hall. The morning of September 11th, he was in a trustee meeting for the medical and pension plans near 51st and 9th Avenue. During the meeting someone popped their head in to tell everyone that a plane hit the WTC. They assumed a small training aircraft had been involved. When they were notified a second plane was hit John went over to the hall and no one knew what was going on. They were told not to go down there and everyone went home. He realized that night *"Oh, I think I should go in. Something could happen, you know? What's*



View from inside 'The Pit.' Photo by Charlie Marroquin

gonna happen with all of the shows, what's going on? So I remember going to a train station, and train that normally, there was probably 150 people on, on a platform each morning. It was me and two other people. They were off the train, Penn Station was empty. I walked up 8th Avenue, and you know, where normally there might be 10,000 people, you know, on regular morning. There was maybe 50 or 100. And when I got to the union hall, I opened the door, and the phones were ringing off the hook." Everyone was calling

in wanting to help. "Some of the electricians, obviously, reached out to the studios, got their generators, got all their equipment trucks and everything, and we were contacted by the New York City Office of Emergency Management."

The OEM called the hall around noon on September 12th and John started sending members out where the OEM needed them, telling them where to go and get credentials and then where to go be of assistance. As the day went on, various city agencies started calling the hall, and John doesn't even know where they got our number. First call was for as many EZ UP tents as we could find. Then we received calls for cots, video cameras, monitors, generators, tarps, walkie talkies, carnival tents, and even park benches.

All the vendors donated supplies. Among those donating equipment were Panavision, Paramount Production Court (now Insight), Alan Suna's Silvertrucks, Kaufman provided generators and equipment. Tony Argento's Luna Lighting provided lighting equipment, and Feature Systems provided generators. Third Watch, a TV Show line produced by Brooke Kennedy, sent two trailers down with all their lighting and grip equipment as well as their catering truck.

When John called vendors such as State Supply and Angel Aerial asking for help, *"no one asked for a dime."* John and the hall sourced and tracked all the equipment NYC needed during the day and at night John would go to hospitals trying to find his best friend who had died in the crash.

Jim Miller organized a group of people to work down at the site. He was helping with the lighting as well as with the dust suppression. Through his company

he provided the water trucks to wet down the dust and debris so that the firefighters could see in front of them. The water was also used for whatever clean up projects were needed.

Dan Mahoney, at the time Local 52 Business Representative, became liaison coordinator of the Mayors Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Fire Chiefs. He made sure everyone had what they needed and were credentialed. Red tags were given to people who were allowed anywhere in the compound, and yellow were given to those who were not authorized to go in the pits. Dan would relay the info from the Fire Chiefs to Ken Finlay and Mugsy Malone who were some of the lead Gaffers on site. Much of our equipment was stationed on Church Street. We lit the temporary police headquarters in the Burger King that's still at Liberty Street as well as the firehouse across from the WTC.

James "Mugsy" Malone called the office on the 12th, spoke to John Ford, and went down to Ground Zero to light the site. As one of the main Gaffers lighting the site his truck was stationed outside of Trinity Church and would work six out of seven days a week. Around 3pm he'd drive down the west side highway with the generators. *"There would be people standing on the side, cheering us on. They were glad to see us... because a lot of those people had lost people."* The site at first was a complete organizational mess. The first four days there was a lot of confusion. They got the first Musco light set up almost right away when he first got to the site and the second one was set up by 4pm the same day. *"It looked like a set, something we would build. We would say we were going to a set. It was a set, Ground Zero."*

He had twenty four 6ks running as well as Maxi Brutes and Ruby-7s spread throughout the site. He also did whatever was needed by the firefighters and the work took its toll emotionally and physically over the 24 days he spent there. He'd find remains and help send them out to be identified, and it still haunts him what he saw



From Right: Jay Fortune, Peaches Dolan, Mugsy Malone, Dan Mahoney, Kevin Finlay

in the pit. Even though everyone wanted to help, many members only lasted a few days *“because there were fireman walking around with red buckets from home depot picking up body parts... We had the big wheels [landing gear] from the second plane at the back of our truck.”*

Lowell Schulman got in contact with Bobby Wilson who was Captain of the Mayors Office of Emergency Management and started coordinating lighting needs with them directly. Lowell was told by the Fire Chiefs they *“wanted the night to look like day and we did.”* (Peaches Dolan) Lowell got all the Musco lights they needed into the city. He was instrumental in meeting with the head of FEMA as well as the OEM and organizing many things for them. He went down to Ground Zero almost right away. He arranged with Silvertrucks, Feature Systems, and Paramount Production Support among others. He called up Jim Arata at Kaufman Astoria Lighting and said whatever you have bring it down here. *“I’m not saying Lowell led the whole parade but he was very crucial in getting help and trying to figure out how to put the film community with everyone else.”* (Charlie Marroquin) A group of about twenty five Local 52 members including Lowell would go down into the pit and light wherever the firefighters needed it.

The Fire Chiefs needed really strong lights to not only turn night into day, but also to drive that light deep into the crater. One of the largest, if not the largest, Musco Lights was in Washington D.C. The roads were closed and Lowell was instrumental in arranging a police escort to bring that light to Ground Zero. One Musco was staged on the corner of Liberty and Greenwich street and another at West and Vesey street.

They would carry battery powered lights, run cable, repair lights, whatever the firefighters asked. Peaches, Lowell, and Charlie Marroquin and others would go into the pit with sun guns and balloon lights and light the pit. Days were long, and they would start a few hours before sunset and end after sunrise. They would meet on the West Side Highway, drive in the cab of the generator trucks down Canal, make a right on West Broadway and at a certain point *“I lost all my emotions from one point for the whole night, until I passed that spot again.”* (Peaches Dolan) You weren’t asked if you were coming in the next day. You just went in if you could.

Jerry De Titta worked with Mugsy Malone cranking up the portable generators and turning them on, and then lighting the site wherever was needed. What was most memorable to Jerry was seeing all the firefighters from across the country coming to

help. He saw firefighters in groups all geared up and particularly remembers those from Seattle, Vancouver, and Detroit.

People would line up on the route handing supplies such as socks and water. One time a young girl came up to Peaches and handed him a bracelet that said ‘thank you.’ They were giving out whatever they could find that might help the emergency workers through the night. Peaches said that effort was incredible. *“You know... we never thought twice about the whole thing. We just did what we needed to do. Hopefully we were gonna save somebody but never did.”* The strangest thing he noticed down there is he couldn’t see any personal effects. All he could see down there were *“metal, ash, and paper.”*



Top Left: Dan Mahoney and Tim Guinness

Bottom Left: Tim Healy, Tom Yostpille, John Duval

Top Right: Front of picture- Charlie Marroquin, Jerry De Titta, Sammy Bender, Ken Finlay, Mugsy Malone.

Second row- Al Stetson, Noah Prince.

All the while the Teamsters played a huge role. All the generators and trucks were driven down and coordinated sending people and replacing generator filters and filling them up with gasoline for the generators, and organized delivery of all the tents sent down.

Shea Stadium was being used as a Red Cross depot, being used as a donation and meal staging point for firefighters going to Ground Zero. Firefighters would grab

what they needed and head out together to Ground Zero. They would return the same way they came, picking up a hot meal to eat after their shift and then head home.

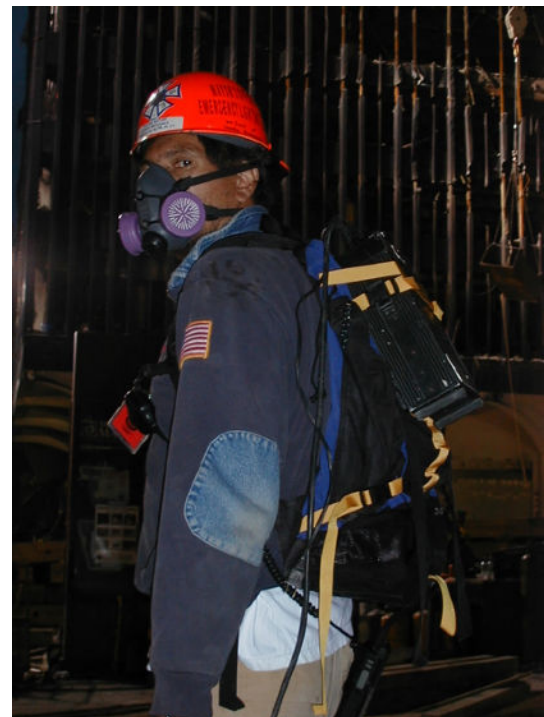
Our members were in charge of all the lighting at the site, work light towers, setting up crank lights, managing and filling up the put-put generator.

The Mets were going to be the first baseball game after the attacks, so we relocated the donation depot to the nearby marina so the firefighters could arrive by boat. Before that happened the Mets were planning to fly an enormous flag and were having trouble figuring out how to light it. 52 members stepped up, *“We got a boatload of, two or three scaffoldings, crank, crank ups, super cranks, and Maxi Brutes, and Ruby-7s, and we lit it.” (Rocco Palmieri)*

Two weeks after 9/11 the City switched from a rescue mission to one of recovery, winding down some of their operations, returning much of the equipment they had asked for. The OEM realized they needed to keep some of the workers on past that point to continue providing services, and by October 7th the city mandated that they become union. John Ford and George De Titta wrote up a contract. Frank Connolly wrote one up for the Teamsters. Within two hours of the city’s request, they had contracts in hand.



The Sun Gun in action in ‘The Pit’



Charlie Marroquin wearing the portable Sun Gun rig

After the emergency phase was over all the volunteers were sent away but Charlie Marroquin kept coming in till December. They brought in 3-4 Sun Guns that they had gotten for free as well as a backpack they could put the large and heavy battery into so that they could be portable. He and Lowell would go in in the pit and help with the search and rescue. They were able to stay on as volunteers in order to keep track of those Sun Guns.

After October 7th, the Fire Chiefs asked us to replace the Musco Lights. They wanted smaller, more mobile rigs so the 52 members built smaller units and rigged them in lifts. Jim Miller and the rest of the contracted crews would remain working through July. Angel Aerial started with three water trucks and quickly ordered four more manufactured to service the site. Some of the trucks rotted away due to the conditions on site, and none working there are still in use. Ground Zero was not a kind environment to both living people and machines, and a few years later Jim's pickup truck that he drove down to the site completely fell apart.

There were around one hundred of our members working the whole Ground Zero site, but there were still around twenty members by July. Jim was one of the last contractors working the site. Jim is proud of the work they did there and the much needed funds they were able to infuse into the Local 52 and 817 Teamsters pension and healthcare funds.

Jim wants everyone to remember *"the unionism that's necessary for people to bond in a time that our nation needs us, that we are a group that believes they have a responsibility towards civic involvement."*

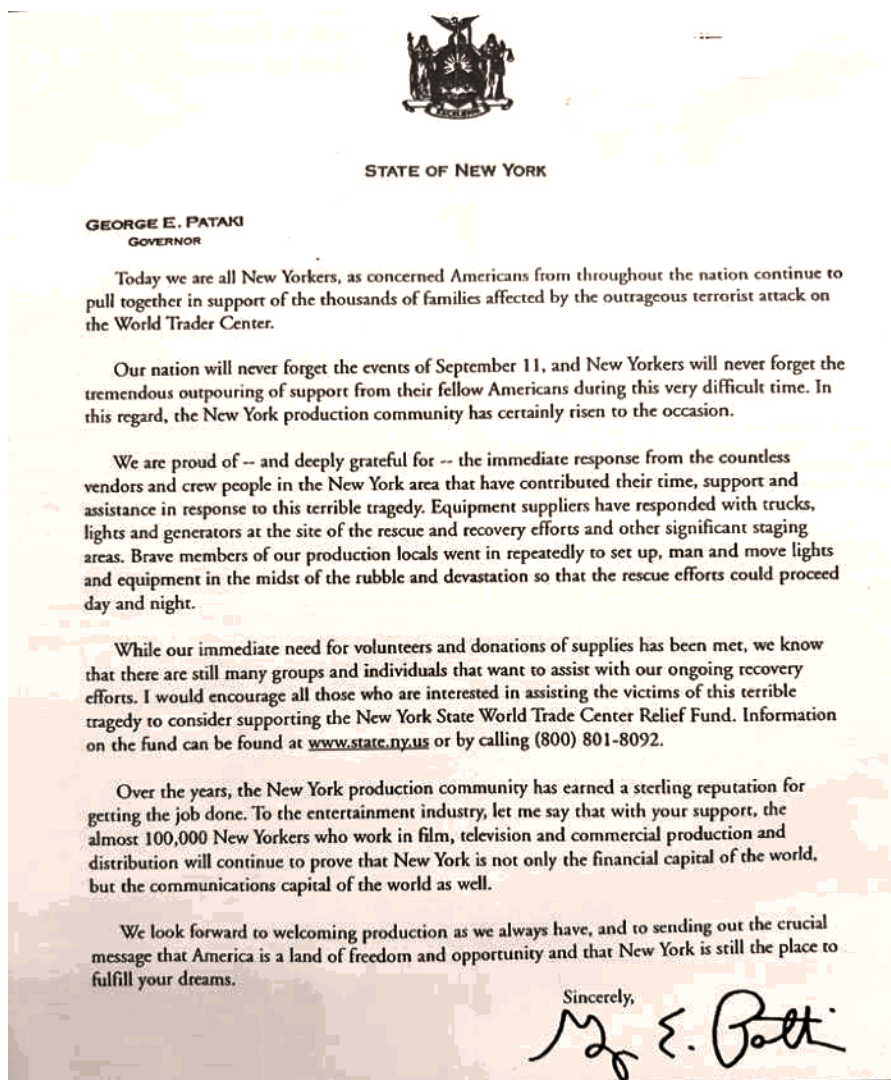
We managed to return all of the supplies we borrowed other than a few walkie talkies that were lost and which the hall paid to replace. John is proud of our union response to the crisis. *"I have to say, the membership stepped up, right off the bat. No questions asked... [members would say just] tell me where we got to be and we'll be down there."*

Dan Mahoney said of John's work *"John Ford was unbelievable in all of this, so unbelievable. He didn't go down the Ground Zero, but he was in the office coordinating all of this kind of stuff... [the OEM would say] we need 60 push brooms or something like that. Whatever it was, he was sending stuff everywhere."*

Charlie Marroquin, Lowell Schulman, Dan Mahoney, and others were invited to be guests at the memorials in 2002 and onward. Dan said *"2001 was 52's Shining moment for all the efforts everyone went through."* Despite our shining moment, many members suffer from their work and are on the health program for 9/11 related

conditions. *"In retrospect, I wish we weren't, because of the health issues and the death that people suffered."* (Anonymous member)

Local 52 wrote a letter thanking those who had helped but unfortunately missed some of those who not only volunteered but were instrumental. This article is to serve as a record of some of our members shining moments during a perilous time, but not for all of them. If anyone wishes to clarify or add to the stories please do not hesitate to reach out. It is important to understand the significance of what we can do as a union for the greater good, even if it only comes through in our darkest moments. We should be proud of our work and what we can do together as a union.



Musco Light in action



Ground Zero Credentials

September 11th, 2001, the world witnessed a tragedy that will forever, the attack on the World Trade Centers in New York. In the wake of that horror, I found hope in the strength of my fellow Americans - people of all nationalities, from all over the country. The spirit of the rescue teams working on this grim task. Finding these kinds of supplies is what we do every day when we are at work. Each of us has a huge relationship with vendors and a savvy understanding of the industry.

The IATSE would like to express our solidarity and thanks to all of those individuals who have donated their time and service during this tragic event.

"The events of September 11, 2001 severely tested the spirit and will of all New Yorkers and of our Country. Tested yes, broken no, strengthened absolutely! Strengthened, because in our City's greatest "Hour of Need" the women and men of Local 52 IATSE stepped forth by providing a vital service to the rescue and recovery efforts at the World Trade Center."

Dan Mahoney, Business Representative, Studio Mechanics Local No. 52

"I must commend Secretary-Treasurer John R. Ford and Business Representative Dan Mahoney for their take-charge attitude in arranging for manpower, equipment and supplies; Local 817's Tom O'Donnell, Brian Maxwell and Jim Leavey for logistical support and moving the generators where needed. And most particularly, the Local 52 guys and girls tending the lights,...especially Lowell Schulman, Mugsy Malone, Jay Fortune, Ken Finlay, Tim Guinness and John Begley, [who] are our "Gaffers," working with the Fire Department..."

George DeTitta, President, Studio Mechanics Local No. 52

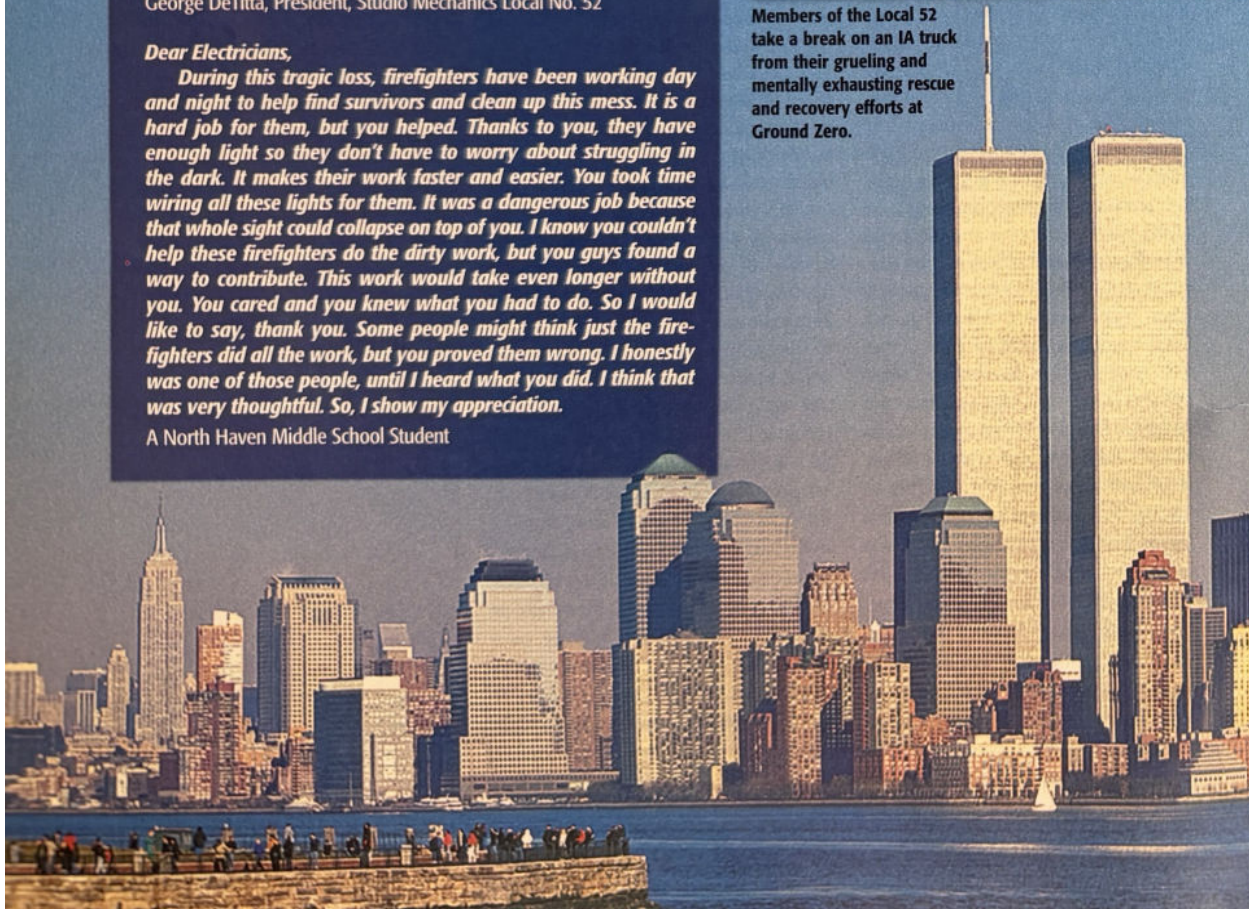
Dear Electricians,

During this tragic loss, firefighters have been working day and night to help find survivors and clean up this mess. It is a hard job for them, but you helped. Thanks to you, they have enough light so they don't have to worry about struggling in the dark. It makes their work faster and easier. You took time wiring all these lights for them. It was a dangerous job because that whole sight could collapse on top of you. I know you couldn't help these firefighters do the dirty work, but you guys found a way to contribute. This work would take even longer without you. You cared and you knew what you had to do. So I would like to say, thank you. Some people might think just the firefighters did all the work, but you proved them wrong. I honestly was one of those people, until I heard what you did. I think that was very thoughtful. So, I show my appreciation.

A North Haven Middle School Student



Members of the Local 52 take a break on an IA truck from their grueling and mentally exhausting rescue and recovery efforts at Ground Zero.



This and following page- IATSE bulletin in response to the efforts at Ground Zero

**IATSE MEMBERS
WHO DONATED
THEIR TIME IN
THE RESCUE
AND RECOVERY
RELIEF AT
GROUND ZERO
AT THE WORLD
TRADE CENTER
IN NEW YORK
CITY.**

Greg Addison
Richard Audino
Paul Bailey
Rodney Bauer
Kelly Beaton
John Begley
Sam Bender
Timothy Berg
Michael Berg
Tim Berg
Laurent Blanchette
Hugo Bonilla
Gary Brink
Sam Burrell
Bill Cassidy
Samuel Chase
Fred Chesterman
Archangelo Ciotti
Jack Coffen
Peter Colavito
Charles Colon
Steve Comesky
Patrick Cousins
Ralph Crowley
Paul Daley
Jeremiah Dalton
Andy Day
Chris De Titta
Gerald De Titta
Guido De Curtis
Moira Demos
Keith Devlin
James Dillinger
James A. Dolan
James P. Dolan

Thomas Dolan
Jesse Dublanica
John Duvall
Scott Eberle
Thomas Farmer
John Farraday
Greg Farrell
Gregory Farrell
George Feldbauer
Edwin Figueroa
Kenneth Finlay
John Finnerty
Dan Fisher
Martha Fishkin
Joseph Fittipaldi
Ray Fortune
Jay Fortune
Michael Fradianni
Steven Fratianni
John Fundus
Richard Galante
Jamie Gallagher
James Galvin
William Geiger
Carolyn Gershenson
Don Glenn
Damian Gonzales
Charles Goodman
Timothy Guinness
James Harris
Tim Healy
Thomas Hill
Thomas Hocking
Anthony Lulo
Jenny Kane
Kathleen King
William Klatt
Eric Kutner
Ross La Terra
Sal Lanza
Maddy Ledermann
Charles Libin
Martin Lowry
Todd Mac Nicholl
Dan Mahoney
Carmen Maldonado
Dennis Malone

James V. Malone
Sean Malone
James Manzione
Charles Marroquin
Rick L. Marroquin
Michael Maurer
David McAllister
Francis McBride
John McCabe
Sean McCague
Sean McCardell
James McCullagh
James McMillan
John Merriman
James Miller
Jeff Naparstek
Mark Newell
Andrew Niceberg
Jon Nussbaum
George Ellas Ortiz
Rocco Palmieri
Rudolph Pelikan
Balint Pinczehelyi
Richard Porta
Noah Prince
Jonathan Ramirez
Michael Rattinger
Michael Reed
Malcolm Reid
James Richards
Kevin Roach
Mathew Rohn
Nat Russell
Philip Saad
Klaus Schreiber
Jeremy Schroeder
Lowell Schulman
Tristan Sheridan
James Silverstein
David Skutch
Alan Stetson
Derrick Still
Bob Stocklin
John Suriano
Alexander Toles

Irma Vando
Peter Vietro-
Hannum
Thomas
Von Rauchhaupt
James Walsh, Jr.
James Walsh, Sr.
Paul Wardwell
Thomas Yostpille

**THE IA
INDIVIDUALS
WHO DONATED
THEIR SERVICES
AT YANKEE
STADIUM FOR
THE PRAYER
FOR AMERICA
SERVICE ON
SEPTEMBER 24,
2001.**

Glenn Acosta
Frank Alter
Carl A. Baldasso
Steve Beers
Scott Bender
Robert Borch
Jonathan Bracken
Anne E. Bradford
Josh Braun
James E. Brien
Kenny Brock
Stephen Burns
Bryan F. Chebetak
Andrew S. Claffey
James J. Claffey, Jr.
Gary Cohen
Charles Copper
Paul Davila
Marcial E. Davis
Tracy DeMarzo
Kevin Dessiso
Francis P. DeVerna, Jr.
Manny Diaz

Michael Donnelly
Edward J. Donohue
George A. Donohue
Richard E. Donohue
George Dummitt
Ephraim Dunskey
Frank Dwyer, Jr.
James Edmiston
Ryan Ensser
Thomas Fedigan
Michael R. Fedigan
Edmund B. Fisher
Raymond Frederick
Lonnie Gaddy
Alejandro C. Galvez
Philip Giller
Antonio Goncalves
Ronald Gort
Angelo Grasso
Arthur Grillman
Michele Gutierrez
Holly P. Hanson
Hugh Hardyman
James Harris
Joseph Harris
Freeman Hawes, II
Chris Higgins
Chad Holly
Ray Howell
Steven J. Jones
Jaki Johnsen
Brad Kaplan
Christopher P. Kelley
Michael W. Kelly
David Kidd
Deirdra Kragnes
Frank Linn, Jr.
John Magliula
Robert Matzler
Timothy McCulloch
Robert McDonough
Kevin McElligatt
David J. McKennan
Paul Merkle
Stuart Mildener

Kevin Nesbitt
German Pavon, III
Ron Rebentisch
Michael Ross
John Santagata
Christopher
Schubert
Robert Score
John B. Senter, III
Jennifer Sharpe
Jay Silverstein
Donna M. Smith
Bob Somerville
Helen Toth
Albert Toth
Glenn Treubig
Emilio P. Uriarte
Jerry Valenzuela
Gilbert Velez
John F. Warburton
Stewart Wagner
James J. Whelan
Richard J. Wirth
Erik Yans

**EQUIPMENT
SUPPLIERS**

Angel Aerial
Available Light
Camera Service Ctr.
Feature Systems
Hello World Comm.
Kaufman Astoria
Studios
Luna
Musco Lites
Navesync Sound
Panavision
Paramount Prod.
Support
Paris Lighting
Silver Trucks
State Supply
Steven Zuch
Enterprises
Third Watch
Xeno Lights, Inc.



The following photos were provided by Dan Mahoney, Business Representative IATSE Local 52, from "Ground Zero" of the World Trade Center, New York City. We realize this is a sensitive issue and some of the photos may be disturbing. We apologize for any inconvenience.