Rider remembers Sept. 11, vigil, speeches

By Laura Sass
Executive Editor

America, heroism and the Rider community were the three focuses of the ceremony that took place on Thursday, Sept. 11, at 7 p.m. in the Cavalla Room.

The ceremony, entitled “An Evening of Remembrance and Reflection,” was intended to honor America’s heroes, according to Ryan Kimball, the Student Government Association (SGA) president, who took the podium amid pictures of the World Trade Center and American flags.

“Two years ago, on Sept. 11, I saw the country I grew up in, the country I loved, in a state of chaos,” he said. “But America came back together, only stronger, in a matter of months.”

Kimball next read the names of those in the Rider community who were killed during the attacks, including a continuing studies student who was attending Rider at the time of the attacks.

Western Music Choir College (WCC) singers took the floor to sing the national anthem. After that, attendees were directed outside for the candlelight ceremony.

“Light has always been a symbol, in every culture, in every religion,” said Rev. Nancy Schluter, a chaplain, as candles were lit and passed around the circle formed by members of the Rider community. “Today we use that symbol to remember those who were lost on Sept. 11.”

Schluter led the audience in a prayer, and then they began to sing “America the Beautiful.”

“My own son was in the World Trade Center that day,” she said. “I did not know until that night whether he lived or died. It was a very trying day for all those who knew someone who was in New York (City) that day. People in the Rider community helped me to help others. We are here today to remember those who died and the families that were left behind.”

The audience was directed back into the Cavalla Room, where Kimball explained that the floor would be open to all those who wanted to say a few words about Sept. 11. He had a slide show, displaying pictures of that day and patriotic images.

“You have to remember that you are in a nation that literally saved the world in World War I and World War II, a nation that has saved other nations at the cost of the blood of its own sons and daughters,” he said. “You are in a nation that has given more financial relief than any other, the nation that has sheltered the world’s orphans. God bless America.”

Shawn Hammer, a senior, spoke of a New York City firefighter who stayed with the truck while the rest of his company, 17 men, entered one of the towers. They were all killed.

“I come from a family of volunteer firefighters,” he said. “I feel as if I have lost hundreds of family members all at once. My heart goes out to those firemen who made the ultimate sacrifice.”

Other speakers included Haley Baum, vice-president of SGA, who read a poem, and WCC singers, who sang several songs.

Dean of Students Anthony Campbell said that Sept. 11 was a day of great pain for the Rider community, but also one of inspiration.

“What I remember from that day was the humanity,” he said. “People left themselves behind to care for their neighbor. That was what made me proud to be an American, but maybe even more to be a member of the Rider community.”

Over 2,000 non-profit, public and religious groups across the country are the beneficiaries of Americorps funds. More than 250,000 Americans have served in the organization since President Bill Clinton created Americorps in 1993, providing assistance to millions of Americans.

“I think that Americorps was a great program,” said Diana Walsh, a Bonner scholar. “I felt it was a reward for the community service that I was doing and now that it was cut, it doesn’t give others the chance to be rewarded for something good that they’re doing.”

Jamie Parker, a Bonner scholar, said the program changed her life.

“The way that this program allows such diverse individuals to connect is exactly what the United States needs,” said Parker. “The funding cuts are devastating,” she added. “No compassionate person could let the Americorps program be compromised in this way. This program is so extremely beneficial for so many people. The student participants are educated and uplifted just as much as the community they are serving. It’s very saddening to hear that the funding cuts will prevent a vast number of individuals from experiencing the things that this program has allowed me to experience.”

McGrath said that volunteerism at Rider is still a real possibility.

Will some students volunteer for this program? “I hope,” he said. “Maybe, I hope campus groups will step up.”

For more information, visit www.SaveAmericorps.org.

Americorps volunteers pose after planting crops at the Rutgers Agricultural Farm in New Brunswick. When the crops are harvested, the food will be donated to the homeless.