

## Answering the Call

By Dr. Al Roberts

On the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen people carried out suicide attacks against targets within the United States. Two airplanes smashed into the twin towers of New York City's World Trade Center and another plunged into the Pentagon. A fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania without reaching its intended target. More than 3,000 people, including hundreds of police officers and firefighters, were killed during the assaults.

According to a report by the 9/11 Commission that investigated the horrifying events, casualties at the World Trade Center "were very high among first responders who stayed in danger as they tried to save lives." The report goes on to note that ultimately, "all but approximately one hundred of the thousands of civilians who worked below the impact zone escaped, often with help from the emergency responders."

In honor of the bravery and courage with which men and women faced these strikes against our national security, the U.S. Congress passed bipartisan legislation in 2009 designating September 11 as a National Day of Service and Remembrance. By instituting a tradition of charitable service, the commemoration redirects memories of destruction toward the establishment of hope. It encourages people to show respect to the victims, survivors, and first responders by promoting goodwill and unity. The declaration calls people to work together through service motivated by the desire to make the world a better place.

Our nation's first responders include a diverse range of dedicated individuals who place their duties and responsibilities ahead of their own personal regard. They are professionals and volunteers; they are our nation's first line of defense. The National First Responders Organization defines a first responder in this way: "Any individual who runs toward an event rather than the other way."

In order to perform their duties, first responders must be well-equipped. They face day-to-day dangers and handle large scale crises. Being prepared includes undergoing readiness training, maintaining mental and physical capabilities, and being able to deploy safety technologies to meet emergency needs. Because they are such skilled leaders, first responders often serve as role models within their communities.

Southside Virginia Community College takes pride in the part we play in providing instruction and credentialing for people who embrace these vital responsibilities. We offer Associate degrees, Certificate programs, and Career Studies Certificates in the fields of Administration of Justice, Emergency Medical Services, and Fire Science Technology. In addition, we offer CPR and first aid training classes.

If you yearn to answer the call to service, I invite you to visit SVCC's website ([www.southside.edu](http://www.southside.edu)) or call SVCC at 888-220-7822. Admissions personnel can help you to learn about the training opportunities that will qualify you to join the elite cadre of first responders.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at [al.roberts@southside.edu](mailto:al.roberts@southside.edu).