Erie Times-News

City & Region

Honoring the fallen

Firefighters, police, EMTs remembered

By TIM HAHN
tim.hahn@timesnews.com

Bill Vahey didn't feel underdressed in his short sleeves as he stood next to a line of Erie police officers and firefighters in full dress uniform.

He said he felt honored to be ringing the bell in memory of emergency service providers everywhere who gave their lives to the job.

Vahey, a retired Erie deputy fire chief, gripped a small hammer in his gloved right hand and softly tapped a silver bell 15 times as more than 100 people watched in silence from both sides of South Park Row on Saturday morning.

The three five-tap signals represented "Box 5-5-5" — the "last alarm" for a firefighter who died in service, Erie fire Capt. Mike Rinn told the audience.

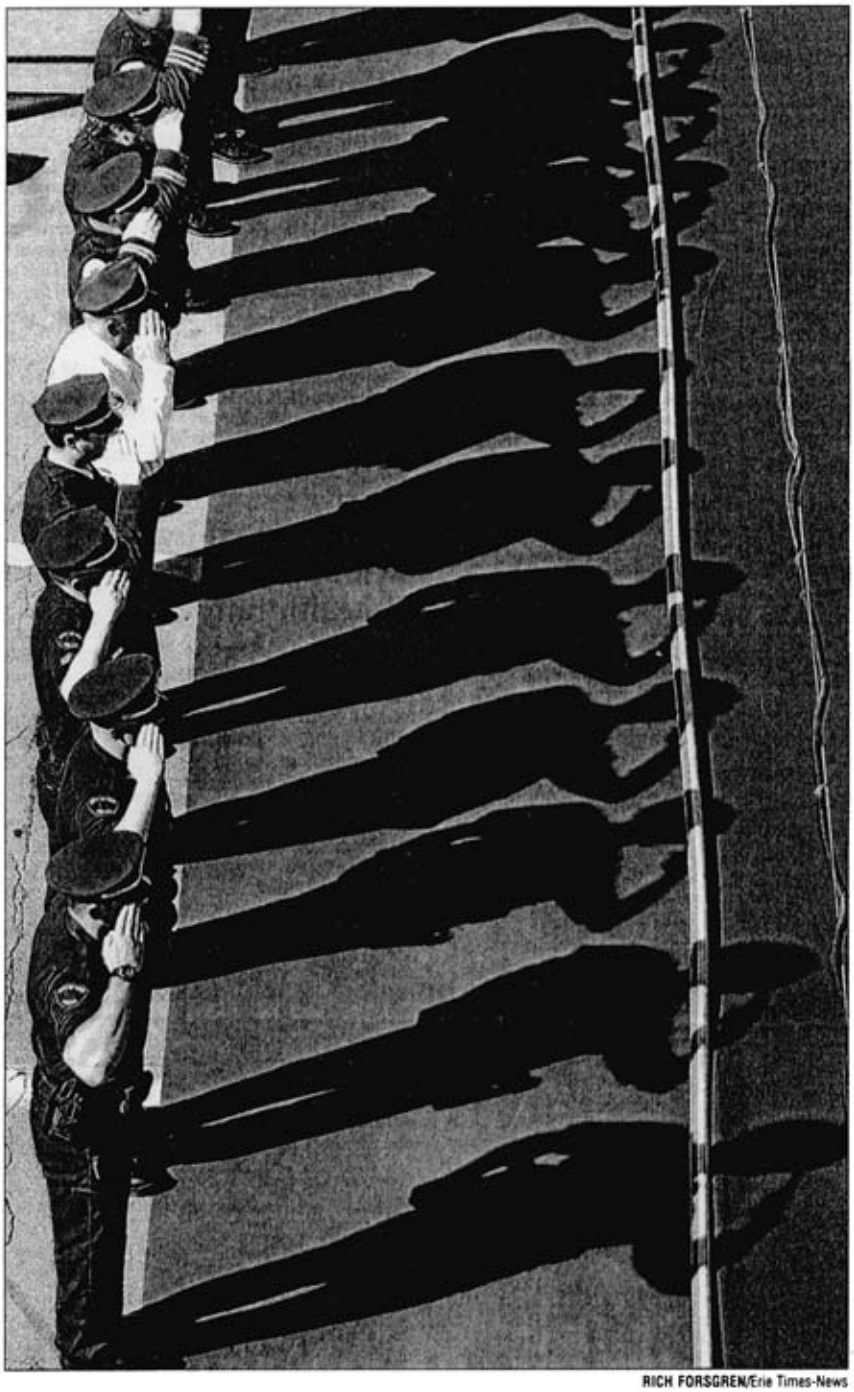
Vahey tapped the bell to remember those firefighters, police officers and emergency medical personnel who lost their lives during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. In honor of those men and women, organizers of the Coors Light Firefighter Combat Challenge opened their relay course to a Junior ROTC color guard, a bagpiper and local emergency service officials for a 10:30 a.m. memorial service Saturday.

"I'm just proud to continue my service as a firefighter and to be part of this wonderful event," said Vahey, who had given his old dress uniform to Deputy Chief Jeff Carroll when he retired, and had only a short-sleeved shirt left to wear.

Saturday's ceremony, although held on the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks, went beyond honoring those killed in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville.

Erie County Public Safety Director Joe Weindorf pointed

Please see ANNIVERSARY 5B



RICH FORSGREN/Erie Times-News

Members of the Erie Bureau of Police, EmergyCare and Erie Bureau of Fire salute during a ceremony in observance of the Sept. 11, 2001, anniversary Saturday at the Coors Light Firefighter Combat Challenge.

Anniversary: Fallen comrades honored

RICH FORSGREN/Erie Times-News

Gretchen Miller stands near the ash tree that was planted Saturday in memory of her son, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy Horton, who was killed in Iraq. Officials at the Lake Erie Arboretum planted the tree to mark the third anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Continued from **1B**

out to the crowd that, 75 yards from where he was standing, Erie firefighters George Scully and Cletus Hess made the ultimate sacrifice when they were killed battling the Isaac Baker fire on the morning of Dec. 11, 1943.

"This is a happy occasion," Weindorf said, referencing the firefighter obstacle course competition that would soon start. "But always remember the sacrifices these ladies and gentlemen face every day."

Terry Bird, a 32-year member of the Erie Bureau of Fire, asked the audience to remember those firefighters, police officers and EMTs still working to keep communities safe.

"We promise the citizens that no matter how much they cut firefighters, how much you disrespect us, how much they take us for granted, we will be there when you need us," Bird said.

Across town, officials at the Lake Erie Arboretum marked the anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, by planting a tree in honor of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy Horton, who was killed in Iraq on May 21.

Horton's mother, Gretchen Miller, marveled at the beauty of the flowering ash planted for Horton, who was a graduate of nearby Strong Vincent High School. But she said she hoped people would think of more than her son when they gazed at the tree and the commemorative sign below it.

"I don't want anyone to forget what our young men and our young women did for our country," Miller said.

TIM HAHN *can be reached at 870-1731 or by e-mail.*