

SWOSU 9/11 Program to Feature New York City Firefighter

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The highest-ranking firefighter to survive the World Trade Center collapse, and the last fireman to escape the devastation, Richard "Pitch" Picciotto, will speak at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford on Tuesday, September 6, just five days before the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

Picciotto was on a stairwell between the sixth and seventh floors of the North Tower when it collapsed on September 11, 2001. An FDNY battalion commander, his is the harrowing true story of an American hero, a man who thought nothing of himself and gave nearly everything for others during one of the nation's darkest hours.

His 7:30 p.m. talk is free and open to the public. The Panorama event will be held in the Fine Arts Center on the SWOSU campus.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Picciotto answered the call heard around the world. In minutes he was at Ground Zero of the worst terrorist attack on American soil, acting boldly to save innocent lives as the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center began to burn—and then to buckle.

Already a veteran of terrorist attacks, Picciotto was present fighting a similar battle after the World Trade Center Bombing in 1993. Again inside the North Tower, where he found himself years earlier, burdened by an eerie sense of familiarity, he focused his concentration on the rescue efforts at hand. But it was there in the smoky stairwells that he heard and felt the South Tower collapse. He then made the call for firemen and rescue workers to evacuate, while he stayed behind with a skeleton team of men to assist a group of disabled and infirm civilians in their struggle to evacuate the inferno. And it was there in the rubble of the North Tower that Picciotto found himself buried for more than four hours after the building's collapse.

Having discovered that members of his team and a 59-year-old grandmother also were alive nearby, he and his men used their radios to send out Mayday calls until they made contact with a firefighter on the ground, and a search party was dispatched. When the light finally appeared about four stories above, he climbed upwards, reached the top, and saw the "unfathomable, mind-boggling destruction." And even then, it was not until after he organized the rescue of the others that he walked across the rubble to safety.

Picciotto's book, *Last Man Down*, is a tribute to the 343 firefighters and 2,400 civilians who lay dead in the rubble that surrounded him on that day. And moreover, it is a heartfelt remembrance of a day of infamy and profound humanity. The book was an immediate *New York Times* bestseller upon its release in May 2002.

Chief Picciotto is also a former New York City police officer, and has served as a fire marshal, an arson investigator, a lieutenant, and a captain prior to becoming chief in 1992. He is a 28-year veteran of the FDNY, and for the past nine years, he has presided over the department's Battalion 11, covering Manhattan's Upper West Side.

He is the recipient of departmental awards and commendations for his bravery and meritorious service.

Additional information about the program is available by calling the SWOSU Public Relations & Marketing Office at 580.774.3063.