FDNY 9-11 HERO

CHIEF RICHARD PICCIOTTO

WILL PRESENT SEPT. 1

JPH LECTURE

Chief Richard “Pitch” Picciotto, the highest-ranking firefighter to survive the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the collapse of the Twin Towers, will be the featured speaker Sunday, Sept. 1, in the John Paul Hammerschmidt Lecture Series at North Arkansas College. His lecture, which is open to the public free of charge, will start at 4 p.m. in the Conference Center of the John Paul Hammerschmidt Business and Conference Center on Northark’s South Campus.

Picciotto was on a stairwell between the sixth and seventh floors of the North Tower when it collapsed on September 11, 2001. A FDNY battalion commander, his is the harrowing true story of an American hero. Picciotto tells an outspoken account of that indelible day, shaking and inspiring audiences to the core.

On the morning of September 11, 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 fought a similar battle at the World Trade Center Bombing in 1993.

Eight years later, he found himself again inside the North Tower.

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 where he heard and felt the South Tower collapse; where he 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 where 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 making 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 some 3,000 civilians that lay dead in the rubble that surrounded him on that day. Moreover, it is a heartfelt remembrance of a day of infamy and profound humanity. The book was an immediate New York Times Best Seller upon its May, 2002 release.

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 twenty-eight 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.

Picciotto’s talk will be the seventh JPH Lecture. He follows astronaut Dr. Jerry Linenger, Sherpa mountain guide Jamling Tenzing Norgay, CIA officers Tony and Jonna Mendez, syndicated columnist Gwynne Dyer, former North Vietnam prisoner of war Colonel Edward L. Hubbard, and 1972 Olympic 800-meter-run champion Dave Wottle as a speaker in the series.

Funded by private gifts to the North Arkansas College Foundation, the JPH Lecture Series sponsors national experts to speak about topics of interest to the people of northern Arkansas. Congressman Hammerschmidt has an office at Northark, and many of his photographs, awards, and other memorabilia area on display in the building that bears his name.