

# Honoring

## Our First Responders

### Honor first-responders at in-person, virtual events in the Phoenix metro area

By **Richard H. Dyer**  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

This year marks the 19th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

The date is now observed as Patriot Day or as a National Day of Service and Remembrance. While COVID-19 concerns have required some events to be canceled, there are commemorations and ceremonies open to the public that are to be held in the Phoenix area, some virtually.

#### Glendale

The annual Phoenix 911 Tower Challenge held at Gila River Arena has transitioned to a virtual format, organizers said.

“In honor of those who lost their lives on 9/11/2001, and in continued honor of our first responders and military who protect us from foreign and domestic threats, we gather to pay our respects at the annual 911 Tower Challenge,” according to a release.

“The World Trade Cen-

ter’s Twin Towers each consisted of 110 floors and 2,071 steps, and each year thousands of people across Arizona walk, climb and run the stairs to remember. Firefighters in full gear, police, military and bomb squad personnel march steadily alongside civilians of varying ages, abilities and backgrounds,” it states.

Go to [www.911towerchallengefoundation.org](http://www.911towerchallengefoundation.org) to register. Virtual attendees will find a location such as a gym stair-stepper, running/walking or high school stadium steps to complete the challenge on their own.

#### Apache Junction

U.S. flags will be placed at Apache Junction’s focal point, on the northeast corner of Phelps Drive and West Apache Trail, in remembrance of those who died on Sept. 11, VFW Post No. 7968 Auxiliary President Dani Greene said.

“On Sept. 9 at 10 a.m. we will be putting up flags at the focal point in remembrance to the Sept. 11th tragedy and all that lost their lives. All are welcome to help,” she said.

“Our post will be doing a flag raising as well at our Post No. 7968 at 12 p.m., followed by coffee and cake,” she said.

VFW Post No. 7968 is at 250 S. Phelps Drive in Apache Junction.

On Sept. 11, volunteers will replace tattered U.S. flags dropped off by community members with new flags, Ms. Greene said.

“We have purchased flags that the community can come in, turn in their tattered flags, and we will exchange them for a new one — no cost — and dispose of them properly,” she said.

The tattered-flag project is being held in conjunction with the city of Apache Junction, Apache Junction Parks and Recreation, and the Apache Junction Chamber of Commerce, she said.

VFW Post No. 7968 is open to the public for a membership drive Sept. 11 with lunch 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m., bingo at 3 p.m., and dinner and live music 5-9 p.m. Call 480-671-6239 for information.

Also on Sept. 11, Hatfield Medical Group, 300 S. Phelps Drive in Apache

Junction, is hosting a Patriot Day event from 10 to 11 a.m. to color pictures for troops serving overseas. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the community room is limited to how many may attend. Call 480-536-6840 to register for the event.

“The Color for our Troops is that after the people who are signed up for this class color their picture, I will send those pictures to a place called ‘Packages from Home.’ They will place a picture in each package with a message from the individual who colored it,” Nancy Fassbender, community event coordinator for Hatfield Medical Group, said.

“These packages go to our troops who are overseas. The soldiers enjoy reading the individual message and many times will hang up the picture in their locker,” she said.

#### Scottsdale

The United Salt River Firefighters 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb, held last year at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick, also will be a virtual format.

The annual charity stair climb benefits the National Fallen Firefighters and other local charities.

“This event is a way to honor and remember the FDNY Firefighters, police, EMS and other first responders that gave the ultimate sacrifice on 9/11/2001. Each participant climbs 110 stories carrying a picture of a fallen brother/sister to symbolically complete their heroic journey to save those in need,” according to Facebook @saltriver911stairclimb. “We are opening up our registration website for donations and encouraging participants to engage in our ‘virtual’ stair climb.” Register at [http://events.firehero.org/site/TR?fr\\_id=2205&pg=entry](http://events.firehero.org/site/TR?fr_id=2205&pg=entry).

#### Queen Creek

The town of Queen Creek is asking residents to give the gift of life in honor of the National Day of Service and Remembrance by donating at a blood drive.

Last year’s event was held on Sept. 11. This year it will be Sept. 14, Constance Halonen-Wilson, public information officer, said.

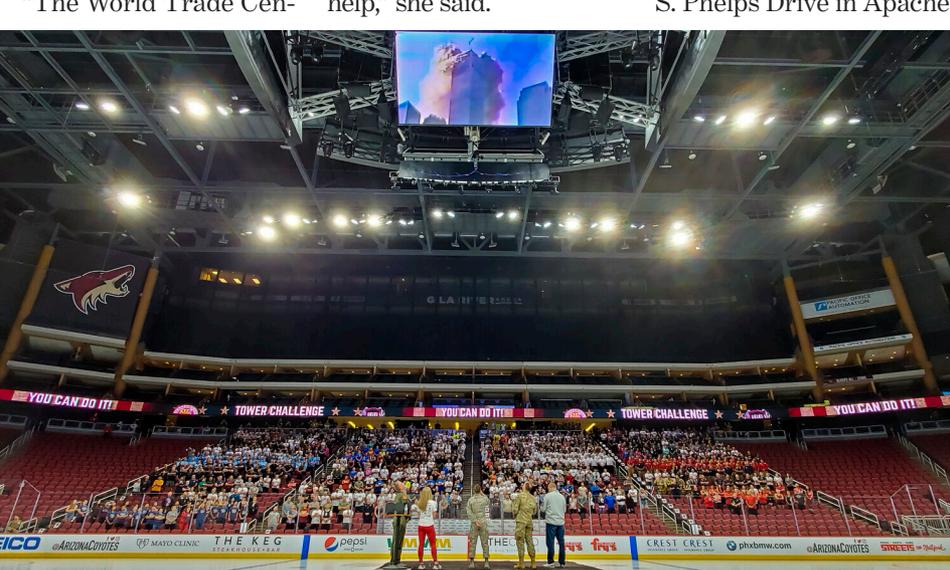
To help slow the spread of COVID-19 and adhere to physical distancing guide-

lines, the drive will take place in the Zane Grey Room of the Queen Creek Library, 21802 S. Ellsworth Road. Advance appointments are encouraged to help maintain physical distancing; go to [Bloodhero.com](http://Bloodhero.com) (use sponsor code QueenCreek) or call 877-258-4825 to reserve a donation time.

If Queen Creek is too far to drive, a search of Sept. 11 at [Bloodhero.com](http://Bloodhero.com) showed blood drives that day in Chandler, Glendale, Mesa, Phoenix and Scottsdale.



Volunteers place flags Sept. 10, 2019, at the focal point at Phelps Drive and West Apache Trail in Apache Junction in honor of all who lost their lives in the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks. [Submitted photo]



The 2019 Tower Challenge at Gila River Arena, from [www.911towerchallengefoundation.org](http://www.911towerchallengefoundation.org). [Airman 1st Class Jacob Wongwai]

# Police departments take to the streets despite COVID-19

By Chris Caraveo  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every branch of life. Public safety is no different.

But while other professions adjust to working from home, police officers, firefighters and other first responders continue to head out into their communities to ensure the public is safe.

“It is just another example of our employees amazing dedication and commitment to the community,” Scottsdale police Officer Kevin Watts stated.

This month, Independent Newsmedia is taking a look across the first responders spectrum and how departments, hospitals and the like have handled the novel coronavirus, in a Salute to First Responders series.

As of Aug. 18, 56 sworn and civilian employees with the Scottsdale department have requested Family Medical Leave Act time off because of COVID-19 to care for a family member or themselves. However, the number does not indicate positive results for either the employee or family members. Mr. Watts said the requests have not impacted the department’s ability to provide public safety services during the COVID-19 crisis.

“As first responders and support staff, we are well versed in our ability to continue to do our jobs under difficult circumstances,” Mr. Watts stated. “That does not mean that there have not been concerns. There have been some as we moved through the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, but nothing of any consequence or to a level that we were not able to address.”

In Goodyear, Officer Lisa Berry said officers have been most concerned with the safety of their families if they were to contract the coronavirus at work. The department remains stocked with personal protective equipment but officials are seeking more in anticipation of long-term needs.

Ms. Berry said eight police employees have tested positive for COVID-19, with



Dozens of groups have donated food, personal protective equipment, cards and other goods to the Scottsdale Police Department throughout the months as officers continue serving the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Submitted photo]

six so far returning to work as of Aug. 20. With so few cases, the department has maintained staff levels with no effects to response times.

“Our officers are committed to the community they serve and have been willing from the start of their careers to put themselves in danger to serve and protect the public,” Ms. Berry stated. “This pandemic has emerged as just another threat to their safety (albeit an invisible one), but has not changed that commitment.”

Throughout the pandemic, work-from-home opportunities have been available for some jobs. Obviously, officers cannot respond to a shooting or domestic violence situation over the phone or Zoom — unless right at the scene to talk with a person in a home.

Scottsdale’s officers have continued to patrol and provide services throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Like other agencies, they are beneficiaries of PPE that allows them to respond to situations while protecting themselves from potentially contracting the virus.

“We may look different sometimes, wearing a mask,

but the service and commitment is the same,” Mr. Watts stated. “Our response times have remained consistent with past years.”

In Goodyear, patrol officers have not scaled back driving through streets and neighborhoods, though the department has directed them to limit personal contacts and social distance when possible.

Scottsdale police continue to hire for multiple positions during the pandemic. Those interested in applying can visit [www.scottsdaleaz.gov/police/join-scottsdale-pd](http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/police/join-scottsdale-pd). However, the process has changed with more online interviews, social distancing when in-person and wearing masks.

In March, when COVID-19 started affecting Arizona, municipalities declared local states of emergency to help manage the spread. In Buckeye, Chief Larry Hall encouraged residents to follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease and Control Prevention and remained committed in serving the public.

“It is our job to maintain public safety,” Mr. Hall stated. “That will continue to

be our mission. As a law enforcement agency, we do not have the ability to postpone or suspend essential activities. That is why I am committed to reducing the likelihood of exposure to our personnel.”

Like other agencies, Buckeye police adjusted certain programs and services. Station lobbies remained open for the public but police advised people to use non-emergency numbers in lieu of coming to the sta-



Goodyear police Chief Santiago Rodriguez looks at a hand-painted flag and slate given to him by Kathryn Whitten of Estrella Mountain Ranch. The department also received pizzas, desserts and soda, just a small snapshot of the number of supplies the community has donated to the department during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Submitted photo]

tion for non-urgent matters. Buckeye police did away with fingerprinting, ride-alongs and volunteer programs until the community got a better hold of the virus.

Across the nation, we have seen citizens and groups step up to provide PPE to first responders. The same is happening in the Valley and police departments are thankful for the support.

“Community support has been tremendous in keeping up officer morale,” Ms. Berry stated. “Officers’ commitment to our community is unwavering and these small gestures by community members are invaluable to their morale.”

In Scottsdale, Mr. Watts said the department’s current supply of PPE is keeping up with demand and is evaluated and resupplied as need.

“We currently do not need any additional PPE equipment, but would like to thank those that have donated over the past few months,” Mr. Watts stated. “The outpouring of support during this very difficult time has been unbelievable. The thoughtfulness and kind gestures of support reminds us daily why we do what we do.”

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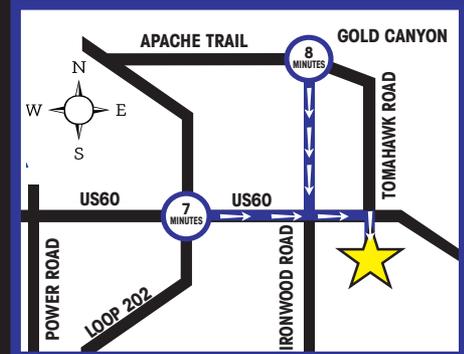
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# Health care workers remain on front lines of coronavirus battle

By **Jeremy Carr**  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Ever since the coronavirus began blanketing the United States, as it has throughout the world, the fight against this potentially fatal disease has been likened to a war zone.

If the metaphor holds, then those in the medical profession are on the front lines of this ongoing campaign.

While standard treatments and procedures continue as necessary, doctors and nurses from across the Valley have had to simultaneously adjust to new modes of operation, risking their own lives and livelihood in the name of providing the best care possible.

“Over the past few months, we have all gained a greater appreciation for the vital contributions of front line health care workers,” said Abrazo Health CEO Brian Elisco. “I am especially proud to be a part of the Abrazo Health network, seeing everyone’s contributions to serve our patients during their time of greatest need. I cannot thank our employees and physicians enough for the remarkable work they’re doing in such a complicated time.”

This work doesn’t end with the care of patients, though, nor does it stop with the nurses and doctors who provide the requisite protection.

“One of the most gratifying things I see as I round are examples of employees going the extra mile to support each other,” states Mr. Elisco. “Our staff — from house-keeping to security to nurs-

es, doctors and everyone in the clinical professions — have been real heroes, balancing compassion with patient care and safety.”

With this in mind, Banner Health facilities have likewise implemented regulations to keep patients and health care workers safe. Visitors are restricted at most facilities, with few exceptions, and patients, employees and visitors at all Banner locations are continuously masked while all employees and visitors are screened for COVID-19 symptoms prior to entering facilities. Lobbies and high-touch surfaces also are cleaned and disinfected frequently.

Banner hospitals also have entrances for surgical patients to avoid lobbies or waiting areas with other patients. Additionally, all COVID units at Banner hospitals throughout the Valley have telehealth technology, enabling physicians to conduct thorough audio/video patient assessments.

The Mayo Clinic similarly supports patients and addresses their health care concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes taking precautions such as patient screening, universal masking and enhanced cleaning of patient care, staff and waiting areas.

Mayo Clinic researchers also are racing to find treatments for COVID-19. A research task force coordinates all of Mayo Clinic’s pandemic-related research activities, from basic lab and in vitro experiments to clinical trials of experimen-



Doctors provided ice cream trucks for staff at each Abrazo hospital in the Valley. The medical staff donated the dessert in recognition of Abrazo employees’ work and commitment to serve the community. [Submitted photo]

tal and supportive interventions. In particular, the task force catalogs all COVID-19 studies and prioritizes potentially competing studies, working with the Institutional Review Board, the Office of Clinical Trials, the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, the biosafety team and pharmacy services to ensure efficient and smooth initiation and execution of studies

The team also ensures the optimal allocation of resources such as biospecimens, drugs and personal protective equipment and protects

the safety and well-being of patients, staff and research volunteers, while collaborating with external companies to access experimental therapeutics to be studied in the research setting.

As with these other medical facilities, Abrazo Health has implemented COVID safety standards in its hospitals to offer peace of mind for those receiving emergency care or elective surgery. And Abrazo officials remind residents their emergencies shouldn’t be ignored even during a pandemic; it’s important they seek care if they

are experiencing a symptom that is affecting their ability to function.

“The number of patients presenting to emergency departments around the Phoenix metro area have decreased, and we want to ensure that people are not delaying necessary medical care,” states Dr. Brian Hess, medical director of emergency services. “We have process in place at every Abrazo hospital to keep you safe as you are receiving care for your emergency.”

Still, Dr. Hess acknowledges with the pandemic a focus

shifted to the management of this new disease.

“With the measures that have been put in place, Abrazo has capacity to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, both in this sense of managing those with this disease and the many others that affect our community,” he states. “Hospital and physician leaders have continued to communicate daily to ensure that we will be well prepared to meet the community’s needs now and in the future.”



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# Fire departments adapt to COVID-19 threat

## Officials bolster sanitation, employee assistance programs

By Matt Roy

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The ongoing public health crisis has disrupted the daily lives of most Americans — this is especially true of the first responders who courageously serve their communities.

While the outbreak has posed special problems for firefighters, paramedics, and EMTs, who are still tasked with the “normal” risks of the job, they have adapted how they work and live.

New workplace procedures, the ways they interact with those in distress and measures to protect and help fire station crews have all been impacted by viral concerns.

According to Surprise Firefighters Association President Mike Payne, first responders in his city are well-equipped for the challenge.

“All members of the Surprise Firefighters have been working in concert with the fire chiefs and city leaders to address COVID concerns,” Mr. Payne said. “Currently we are adequately supplied with personal protective equipment. To date, following CDC guidelines, our safety protocols and equipment have minimized the number of members who have fallen ill.”

Fire officials from across the Valley shared similar sentiments responding to a survey from *Daily Independent*. They shared some ways the novel coronavirus outbreak has affected their departments’ operations and the daily routines of first responders in their employ.

Deputy Chief and Fire Marshal Eric Kriwer, a spokesman for the Arizona Fire & Medical Authority that serves geographically disparate county island communities in Sun City West and Sun Lakes near Chandler among others, said his staff members remain mindful of the new risks.

“Firefighters and emergency responders understand that we are essential workers and proud to be able to serve during our community’s most difficult times,” Mr. Kriwer said. “As responders, we have the same fears as the public regarding bringing the virus home and possibly making our families ill.”

He said as of Aug. 5, more than 42 firefighters had reportedly died from COVID-19 nationally, while thousands of others have been infected.



Volunteers in Sun City West gather donations of handmade face masks to deliver to the Arizona Fire & Medical Authority. [Courtesy of AFMA]

New procedures and equipment have been implemented to mitigate the risks at departments throughout the county, according to local fire officials.

### New rules, added costs

Disinfection equipment, PPE supplies and necessary overtime all have driven up costs, according to Deputy Chief Adam Hoster, a spokesman for the Scottsdale Fire Department.

While his department awaits funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, they’ve had to absorb the new expenses, Mr. Hoster said.

“Scottsdale Fire Department has seen an increase in PPE costs since the pandemic started,” Mr. Hoster said. “In addition, our overtime budgets have seen an increase due to constant staffing of fire engines covering for sick firefighters. Extra deep-cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting all of our fire stations have been included in our facilities budget as well.”

Battalion Chief Julie Moore, public information officer for the Surprise Fire-Medical Department, said new sanitation procedures have cut into the time firefighters once devoted to training and other downtime efforts.

“Firefighters continue to train and clean between calls, but since the pandemic, more time is spent decontaminating and sanitizing equipment, apparatus, and fire stations,” Ms. Moore stated. “We recently purchased an electrostatic sprayer with disinfectant for sterilizing purposes. The

sprayer is safe to use inside firehouses, ambulances, fire trucks, station bays and equipment which may have been exposed to the virus.”

### Field work changes

Capt. Manny Cordova, a paramedic and spokesman for the Goodyear Fire Department, said his crews have changed how they respond to emergencies at homes.

“In the past, most of our firefighters would enter residents’ homes to provide assistance for medical calls with no restrictions. But due to the pandemic, our firefighters now first attempt to evaluate and treat patients in more openly ventilated areas based on guidance from the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Centers for Disease Control to minimize potential COVID exposure,” Mr. Cordova explained.

Mr. Hoster said Scottsdale crews also have modified their procedures for in-home visits.

“The pandemic has caused an increased concern for firefighters in how we triage, treat and transport patients with COVID,” he said. “In the past, an entire fire company would normally enter a patient’s home on an EMS call. Now, for a known COVID positive patient, fire companies will send in only two firefighters, who are fully protected by a gown, face mask, eye protection and gloves.”

In Surprise, the fire department sometimes asks those waiting for help to come outside to meet the crew on arrival, but only if it’s safe to do so, according to Battalion Chief

Moore.

“If possible, and weather permitting, it is helpful if patients with COVID symptoms can wait outside for first responders arrival, especially if other people in the house or facility are COVID-positive,” she said. “This lessens exposures to first responders. If a patient cannot wait outside, the patient and other people inside the house or facility should have a mask on before first responders enter a home or facility.”

And Kim Campbell, emergency manager at AFMA, said their first responders consider the special risks to their constituents, who are mainly of retirement age and especially vulnerable to the effects of the disease.

“The population we serve meets the criterion of the most at-risk community, as the average age is 72 years old,” Ms. Campbell said. “We want to keep our citizens safe through education and be a source of critical COVID-19 information for our constituents through our website social media, and other media outlets.”

She encouraged residents to learn more about the virus and how to limit exposure by visiting the authority’s website: [www.afma.az.gov](http://www.afma.az.gov).

### Help for firefighters

While departments modify their procedures to protect the public and first responders in the field, they’ve also introduced new measures and services to stay safe and cope with stress.

In Goodyear, staffers are checked daily to ensure any

symptoms of infection are caught, Mr. Cordova explained.

“An example of a new procedure needed to add was a daily health monitoring check of our firefighters. The new practice includes temperature checks at the beginning and midway through the daily shift to ensure members have not developed COVID-like symptoms. Checks are conducted every day of every shift, by all crews across the department,” he said.

While in Surprise, department officials offer additional training and counseling to their people.

“SFMD firefighters have received training on COVID during the initial stage of the outbreak. We also have re-



Fire and medical units of the Scottsdale Fire Department respond to a traffic incident while observing personal protective and sanitation measures to prevent spread of the novel coronavirus. Fire officials say they’ve instituted new procedures and policies to keep first responders and members of the public safe in the wake of the pandemic. [Courtesy of Scottsdale Fire Department]

sources for firefighters who would like emotional support such as a department chaplain and the employee assistance program provided by the city of Surprise,” Ms. Moore stated.

### Community helpers

Fire officials said they’re grateful for community allies, who volunteered their time, talent and money to bolster supplies of PPE when the pandemic first emerged, according to Mr. Kriwer at AFMA.

“The Sun City West community was terrific at making masks during the first few months of the pandemic,” he said. “We are grateful for their commitment to our organization and community members, as we were grateful to receive over 3,000 cloth masks.”

He said while the mask donations have tapered, they still welcome the help.

“Although it has slowed, there is still a need for these types of masks so we can provide them to community members and our patients in need,” Mr. Kriwer stated.

Masks and other social distancing efforts remain a crucial component to enhance public safety as the crisis continues, and he urged the public to continue to do their part, he said.

“We have seen positive impacts from wearing masks and best practices in protecting our fellow community members. We ask members of the public to stay diligent during the coming months and not let their guard down,” Mr. Kriwer said.