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CAMPUS REMEMBERS 9/11

STUDENTS ORGANIZE ACTIVITIES TO HONOR VICTIMS AND FIRST RESPONDERS

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | September 11, 2025*Above: Captains prepare appreciation kits for first responders.**Read time: about 3 min*

Samantha Robertson '27 often thinks about her cousin, Christina, who died in the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

Christina Ryook worked on the 104th floor of the North Tower and was killed when the first plane hit that fateful morning 24 years ago.

Robertson wanted to do something on campus to honor her cousin and all of the other victims who lost their lives and the first responders who rushed to rescue them.

"I feel the desire to spread Christina's light to a community apart from her home and family," she said.

On the anniversary of 9/11, Robertson got a chance to do just that. Using a \$5,000 grant she received from the [9/11 Day](#) organization, Robertson organized an event to assemble appreciation kits for local first responders and to write them thank you notes.

9/11 Day is a nonprofit created in the days after the attack in hopes of making a positive difference in the wake of tragedy.



President William G. Kelly writes a thank you note to be sent to local first responders.

"As first responders were so important to the efforts on and after 9/11, I thought it would be fitting to supply Newport News firefighters with anything they may need on a daily basis. At this event, students assembled 200 gift baskets and wrote as many thank you cards," said Roberston, who is majoring in [cellular molecular and physiological biology](#) and also on the [Women's Tennis team](#). "Educational materials were posted at the event in order to further inform students about the impact of 9/11, and why it's so important to our nation."

The event was one of many held on campus to commemorate 9/11, including a city ceremony, three fitness events, and a blood drive.

President William G. Kelly, who in the days following 9/11 commanded a Coast Guard cutter keeping watch off the ports of New York and Boston, was the keynote speaker at the city's 9/11 Honor and Remember Ceremony in Gaines Theatre.

"Ceremonies like this matter," Kelly said. "We must never allow what happened 24 years ago to fade from memory. We cannot let the victims, the heroes, the lessons of Sept. 11th be forgotten - especially in times like these."

The times Kelly referenced have been stained by attacks on political figures.

"In recent months, public servants and leaders of all political views have been attacked, injured, or killed," Kelly said. "While the motives in Utah, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania may differ, the effect is the same: to sow hate and division, to weaken our unity—just as the 19 terrorists sought to do on September 11th."

Kelly said his "hope for today is that we not only reflect on Sept. 11th but also on Sept. 12 and the days that followed.

"That we recommit ourselves to the ideals written in the Constitution and instilled in each of us Americans. That we strive to show what is the very best of what it means to be an American," he said.

Like President Kelly, Robertson also wants to ensure that the memory of 9/11 does not dim over time. She first heard about the 9/11 Day organization when her family volunteered at a meal packing service project it hosted last year at the Cleveland Browns' stadium in Cleveland, near her hometown of Rocky River, Ohio.

"After learning more about this organization, I know it was the perfect opportunity for me to make a difference at CNU," Robertson said. "I wanted to bring this special part of my life to CNU and share it with my peers, since I feel as though 9/11 is being forgotten by my generation.

"With this service project, I hope that students can begin to transform 9/11 into a day of hope, service, and giving back to their community," she said. "I hope students walk away from this event with the knowledge that no good deed, however small, goes unnoticed."

In addition to Robertson's project, Captains had several other opportunities to acknowledge the importance of the day, including a blood drive sponsored by the [CNU American Red Cross Club](#), and three special 9/11-themed workouts: one offered by [ROTC](#) cadets, another by the [Captain Emergency Response Organization \(CERO\)](#), and a third by the [CNU Crossfitness Club](#).

The ROTC and CERO workouts included taking 2,007 steps, the number of steps to reach the top of the World Trade Center. The Crossfitness Club's Never Forget Memorial workout included 110 flights of stairs, 100 squats, 100 sit-ups, 100 lunges and 43 burpees.

"We wanted to find a way to honor and remember the lives lost on 9/11 while also bringing the campus community together. A group workout event felt like a powerful way to do that. The physical challenge symbolizes the endurance and unity shown on that day," said Sarah Bowser '26, president of the Crossfitness Club. "This event reminds us of the sacrifice and bravery that emerged in the face of tragedy. I hope students walk away with a deeper appreciation of the meaning behind 9/11, not just as an historical event, but as a moment that shaped our country and continues to impact people's lives. I hope they experience the sense of community and strength that comes from taking part in something difficult together."