



by **KASEY BROWN**, associate editor

Each of us has personal moments in our lives for which we will always remember where we were and what we were doing. It could be the birth of a child or where you proposed. However, there are only a few days for which most people across the country remember where they were. Sept. 11, 2001, is one of those days.

New York Fire Department Battalion Chief Richard Picciotto especially remembers, because he was in the north tower of the World Trade Center (WTC) when it fell.

The fire chief spoke candidly to attendees about the events of that day to kick off the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show in Kansas City, Mo., Nov. 4-6, 2014.

He saved hundreds of lives by using previous experience evacuating the north tower after the WTC bombing in 1993. The rescue Sept. 11 started as a normal

mission to stop or contain the fire and help those trapped. Priorities changed when the south tower collapsed.

Picciotto's experience from 1993 told him that the bombing had almost taken down the building, and if the south tower collapsed, it was only a matter of time before the north tower would follow suit. He was on the 35th floor when he made the decision to evacuate the north tower.

This meant firefighters stopped moving up the tower to check the floors above and concentrated their efforts on getting all those on their floor and below down three narrow stairwells. Picciotto said it

was one of the hardest decisions he had to make.

After making sweeps of each floor, he was in the stairwell helping a group of nonambulatory people when the north

tower collapsed. It only took 8 seconds, but he said they were the slowest 8 seconds of his life. When the intense rumbling stopped, he thought he was dead. Upon realizing that he and 13 others were alive and in a void in the rubble, he tried establishing radio contact.

Obviously, there were issues, and the group of survivors spent many hours in the void. Refusing to submit to asphyxiation, he noticed a small area that was lighter in color than the all-surrounding black. He carefully went to the spot and shifted some of the rubble. Luckily, it ended up being an opening to the outside. He and the other ambulatory survivors emerged from the wreckage and debris. He likened this to how the country became stronger amidst the wreckage by uniting.

Picciotto said he took four major lessons from Sept. 11, 2001, and the following months of recovery.

(1) You have to put priorities in your life. Enjoy your career success, but don't exclude your family and friends. The best thing that came from Sept. 11, 2001, is that the country strengthened in unity, he

added. He warned against voting for politicians that divide the parties instead of working for the common good.

(2) There is always hope. Look forward to the future, he recommended. The American spirit brought the country through the events of 9/11, and it is necessary to overcome future challenges.

(3) Charity is necessary. He explained that he lost many friends in the collapse of the towers. Support, both financial and emotional, was needed and felt. He shared that a charity was organized for kids who lost fathers in the fire department, and the emotional support was felt from all over the country.

(4) Pray. As the north tower collapsed, he prayed as hard as possible to die quickly. That prayer was unanswered, and he is thankful. He recommended being glad for the things still in store for you from unanswered prayers.

More details of his experience from 9/11 can be found in his book *Last Man Down: A Firefighter's Story of Survival and Escape from the World Trade Center*.



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

**NYFD Battalion Chief Richard Picciotto shared the four lessons he learned from 9/11: You have to have priorities, there is always hope, charity is necessary, and prayer is important.**