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Joseph Maffeo was a Fire Fighter who lost his life in the tragic events of 9/11. Since that day, he is missed by all. To the people who loved him best, his family and friends here long before that day, he died, but rather for the way he lived, Joseph Maffeo made a better place each and every day, by giving of himself, extending a helping hand and displaying a love for his reason we celebrate his life. It is for this reason we celebrate his life and continue his legacy and keep his memory alive through the "Joseph Maffeo Children's Program" at Staten Island University Hospital.

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C O M P L E T I N G A HERO'S WORK

A FAMILY TRANSFORMS A BROTHER'S TRAGIC DEATH INTO
SUSTAINED EFFORTS TO BENEFIT A COMMUNITY'S MOST VULNERABLE CITIZENS

By Jessica Jones-Gorman • Photos By Amessé Photography

After New York City firefighter Joseph Maffeo lost his life in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, his family struggled. Deeply affected by his loss, they both mourned and consistently reflected upon how to best commemorate his bravery and selflessness.

"Joseph lived a life of dignity, honesty, and integrity," noted Linda Manfredi, one of Maffeo's four sisters, who cofounded the Joseph Maffeo Foundation with her husband, Keith, in 2004. "He believed in respect and kindness – two qualities he displayed every single day – and he knew you didn't have to move mountains to change the world. He always thought about others before he thought about himself – an admirable attribute which was evident in both his life and in his death."

Maffeo, who was a firefighter with Ladder 101 in Red

something that would allow me to keep his infectious smile and vivacious personality alive. By creating a foundation in his name, I was somehow able to give meaning to his tragic loss."

The Joseph Maffeo Foundation started small: The Manfredis, who had hosted an annual Christmas party for years, decided to resurrect the event in 2003 after canceling the function for the first two years after Joseph's death.

"We invited our family and friends and told them to bring an unwrapped children's toy," Manfredi said. "Joseph loved children – he left behind an 11-month-old son – so we thought the most charitable thing we could do in his honor was to give toys to children in need." The event was a success, and the following year, the gathering grew to 150 guests.

"We had to take out all of our furniture to welcome guests into our home," Manfredi said. "It was so uplifting to see how many lives my brother touched. It was at that point that I knew we had to take the Foundation to the next level."

So, the Manfredis added a February fundraiser to honor Maffeo's birthday that year and launched a Casino Night that spring. When donations reached a significant level, they began seeking a local beneficiary.

"We approached Staten Island University Hospital and asked them what they needed," noted Keith Manfredi. "After much thought and consideration, we decided we could help address the ever-changing needs that arise in pediatric care."

For the Manfredis, it was the perfect way to honor Joseph. "He was a very simple guy, a wonderful human being who treated people with dignity, plain and simple," Keith Manfredi said. "No' wasn't in his vocabulary, so we wanted the mission of this organization to be a true reflection of who he was."

During the past decade, the Maffeo Foundation has raised \$1.5 million that has supported not only the SIUH's pediatric unit, but a number of other hospital units, including the pediatric section of the Elizabeth A. Connelly Emergency & Trauma Center, the Florina Rusi-Marke Comprehensive Breast Center, and the Children's Cancer Center.

"The Joseph Maffeo Foundation has been blessed with



Hook, Brooklyn, was one of the 343 members of the New York City Fire Department to die that day. He was 30 years old.

"In the days and weeks after 9/11, as my family grappled with this loss, we also witnessed so many acts of kindness," Manfredi said. "So many kind people came to our assistance, and we started thinking of ways to honor Joseph and the goodness that his loss inspired. I began to channel all of my pain into something positive. I found



the confidence, trust, and support of the Staten Island community, as well as the physicians, nurses, and staff at Staten Island University Hospital and Northwell Health,” Keith Manfredi said.

The Foundation’s lead project, a complete renovation of the hospital’s pediatric wing, completed in 2011, served as the ultimate reflection of Maffeo’s legacy.

“That was a signature project for us, one of our first major accomplishments,” Linda Manfredi said. “It was a life-changing experience for the entire family, which was able to help design the unit and really see the legacy of their son and brother fill that space.”

The project took six years to complete because the unit was operational during construction. The Maffeo family devised a concept (the unit focuses on “heroes”) and even helped choose fabrics and furniture. Each room has a Staten Island focus, including murals of the Verrazano Bridge and other landmarks. A firehouse-themed playroom completes the wing.

“We felt that every sick child is a hero unto themselves,” Linda Manfredi said. “So each room is based on a different hero: Dr. Seuss is our literary hero, Jacques Cousteau is our environmental hero. We designed the firehouse playroom in honor of Joseph, and it really helped bring some light into what is often a very somber setting.”

A picture of Joseph and inspirational quotes line the walls. His father, Louis, who served with FDNY for 40 years (retiring as a captain), and his mother, Jean, who died in 2015, took

pride in assisting with the design.

“My mom and dad were instrumental in choosing the quotes, and were proud of how their son is honored here,” Linda Manfredi said. “They were both devastated by my brother’s loss, but helped me realize that we could make something positive out of this. The joy that we get from the idea of his legacy living on is hard to put into words. But just knowing that strangers are talking about him, remembering his spirit – that’s what makes it all worthwhile.”

After completing the pediatric unit, the Maffeo Foundation assisted on several other hospital projects, including a revamping of the ER and Trauma Center. Now it will spearhead fundraising efforts for the construction of a new neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), part of the hospital’s new Women and Newborn Center.

“This new unit will help provide necessary facilities and environment to enable the NICU staff to provide the outstanding care and support they strive to give,” Linda Manfredi said. “Parents eagerly anticipate bringing their newborn home, so it’s frightening if their child is admitted into the neonatal intensive care unit. Under the guidance of Dr. Philip Roth, chair of Pediatrics; Dr. Jonathan Blau, director of the NICU; and Laura Wenzel, senior director of Maternal & Child Health, the Foundation will strive to enhance the capability and care necessary to minimize these fears, by focusing our efforts on the construction of this brand-new neonatal intensive care unit.”



According to the SIUH, the new facility will deliver the latest in life-saving technologies and treatments for the most fragile infants, including those born prematurely or with other severe medical conditions. The NICU will offer this highly attentive care for babies in a family-friendly environment.

On March 16, the Maffeo Foundation will hold its now annual Casino Night, with all proceeds benefitting the new NICU. For Keith and Linda Manfredi, the promise of this unit is yet another example of the generosity Staten Island residents have shown throughout the past decade.

"Nothing we have done or planned to do could be possible without the Staten Island community and our friends and family," Keith Manfredi concluded. "Time after time, they trust us with their hard-earned dollars, contributing with confidence, and trusting that we will turn their donations into something this borough needs."

Linda Manfredi hopes there will be many more projects to come.

"As long as there is a need in this community, we will do our best to make a difference," she said. "Through my brother's death I learned that we are not promised tomorrow, so we have to make today amazing. And helping others in need, hopefully inspiring others to make a difference, too, is something of which Joseph would be very proud."

The Joseph Maffeo Foundation, Inc.

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