

Memorial Day Speech

May 26, 2025

Mayor Jason F. Cilento

Good morning, Dunellen residents, friends, families, elected officials, active-duty military members, and veterans. We're gathered at Washington Memorial Park, surrounded by tributes to our fallen service members, to once again recognize and remember all the brave men and women who gave their lives to defend our great nation.

I want to begin by thanking the Dunellen American Legion Post 119, the Tri-Boro Memorial Post 5479 VFW, and the Parks & Recreation Department for all the planning and organization that goes into putting together our annual Memorial Day Parade & Ceremony. This has been a tradition in our community for as long as I can remember, and I am truly grateful to see both new and familiar faces gathered here today.

I'd like to recognize our friends and neighbors from Green Brook, including Mayor Jim Van Arsdale. Thank you to the members of the Dunellen Borough Council, Council President Sigmon, Councilmember Albertson, Councilmember Lantz,

Councilmember Scott, and all other dignitaries in attendance. Thank you as well to the Dunellen Police and Fire Departments, Department of Public Works, OEM, and Rescue Squad for ensuring the safety of our participants throughout the parade and ceremony. Special thanks to our Grand Marshal, Dave DeNapoli, a pillar of the Dunellen community who recently celebrated his retirement as Dunellen High School's football coach after 29 years. And of course, thank you to everyone who marched in the parade, from local organizations to recreation sports teams and more.

As we gather in honor of Memorial Day, it is important to remember that today is not a day of celebration, but a day of solemn reflection and remembrance. Throughout our nation's history, from Gettysburg to Normandy and Vietnam to Afghanistan, countless individuals have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. It is because of their courage and selflessness that we have the privilege of gathering here today. These heroes were more than soldiers. They were sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, friends, and neighbors. They had goals and aspirations and dreams for the future; however, when they were called to serve, they answered without a second thought and laid down their lives to defend all of us back home.

They said goodbye to family and friends with no guarantee of a safe return, all to serve a cause much greater than themselves, and that is truly admirable.

In Dunellen, our veterans are at the heart of our community. We proudly display 119 banners as part of our Hometown Heroes Program to recognize all those who served, including those who made the ultimate sacrifice and those who returned home. We've continued adding new banners throughout the years that line North Avenue and Washington Avenue, which remind us of our neighbors, past and present, who fought to defend all that we, as Americans, hold dear. In speaking of our Hometown Heroes, I'd like to take a moment to remember George W. Hodulik, who passed away at the beginning of this year at the age of 98.

George was a World War II and Korean War veteran and a friend to all in the Dunellen community. His legacy will live on in our Miracle Mile through Dunellen's firehouse, which was named in his honor. We miss you, George, and we are grateful for all that you've done for our community and our nation.

After this ceremony has concluded, may we all keep the true spirit of Memorial Day in our hearts, for one day a year simply isn't enough to repay our fallen heroes. It is our responsibility to tell

their stories and learn from the past so we may create a brighter future for all. May we live in such a way that honors the legacy of our veterans and ensures that their sacrifices are not lost to history.

May God bless you, our veterans, the Borough of Dunellen, and the United States.

Thank you.