

# The Freedom Flag

The Freedom Flag was designed and created by Richard Nicholas Melito of Richmond, Virginia to memorialize the victims of the horrific events of September 11, 2001. The first flags were hand-sewn by Richmond flag maker Mary N. Cardinal, daughter of dressmaker Margaret Sanchez from Long Island, New York.

In the days and weeks following the attack on America, Richard Melito struggled with the same emotions that all Americans were feeling: shock, grief, anger, and fear. Mercifully, time softens the jagged edges of our collective sorrow. Our nation began to come to terms with a new world reality, and we returned to our lives and routines. And this is how it should be. Had we been permanently crippled, the terrorists would have prevailed.

Yet, like so many Americans, Richard Melito felt a powerful need to honor and remember the thousands of souls who perished on September 11 — the innocent victims as well as the brave heroes who willingly sacrificed their lives for the sake of freedom. He also wanted to acknowledge the pain and suffering of the survivors — those who lost loved ones and those who lived through the attacks.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for creating a flag is the need for a lasting symbol that will remind generations to come that our freedom is a precious and fragile gift. Let no one ever forget the events of September 11, 2001. Let no one ever take for granted our freedoms. Let no one ever forget those who died to protect and defend those freedoms.

And so on September 20, 2001, Richard Melito designed The Freedom Flag. On October 25, the first three flags were sewn by Mary Cardinal of Banner Ideas Flag Company. Acting on the advice of Paula Hersh, Marketing Director for WWBT Channel 12, Richard Melito presented The Freedom Flag to Dr. Charles F. Bryan, Jr., Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Virginia Historical Society. Virginia's First Lady, Roxanne Gilmore, also expressed interest in The Freedom Flag.

On November 12, 2001, The Virginia Historical Society officially adopted The Freedom Flag as a major element of a special exhibition in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution to commemorate the events of September 11, 2001. On December 16, the original four-foot by six-foot Freedom Flag was unveiled during a private dedication at Melito's Restaurant in Richmond, Virginia.

## What The Freedom Flag Represents

The Star	All who lived and died for freedom
The Bars Around the Star	The Pentagon and the organized protection of our freedom
The Blue Background	All Americans united together for freedom
Top Red Stripe	The bloodshed of those who perished at the Pentagon and the crew and passengers who died on American Airlines Flight 77
Two Middle Red Stripes	The Twin Towers and the bloodshed of the people who perished at the World Trade Centre on American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175
Bottom Red Stripe	The bloodshed of the crew and passengers who perished on United Airlines Flight 93 in Pennsylvania
Three White Stripes	The rescue workers, fire fighters, police officers, Port Authority employees, and others who worked tirelessly before, during, and after the terrorists attacks.

Richard Nicholas Melito was born in Suffolk, Virginia, in 1952, the son of James Melito, Jr. and Bridget Melito. After attending Virginia Commonwealth University, Richard worked in the banking industry as well as the restaurant business before opening his own neighborhood restaurant in 1981. Melito's Restaurant is a third-generation owned and operated family-style restaurant and tavern, continuing the tradition begun by Richard's grandfather, James Melito, Sr., in 1940.

This document was written and produced by Linda Snyder and Theresa Stokely.

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