OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS

MEMORIAL

QUEEN OF HEAVEN CEMETERY

HILLSIDE, ILLINOIS

Alumni of the Chicago Royal Airs Drum & Bugle Corps will meet at a memorial service on December 1, 2024 commemorating the 66th Anniversary of the Our Lady of the Angels Catholic School fire. That tragic fire, which claimed the lives of ninety-two children and three nuns, on December 1, 1958, also claimed the lives of three students who were members of the Chicago Royal Airs – Valerie Thoma, Frances Guzaldo and Roger Ramlow. Nine other members of the Corps, who also attended OLA during the 1958 to 1959 school year, survived. A total of twenty-three members of the Royal Airs attended OLA in the years before, during or after the fire.

All are welcomed to join with the Royal Airs and fire survivors, and the family and friends of those who perished in that terrible tragedy. The short service will take place promptly at **11AM** at the Our Lady of the Angels Memorial at the Holy Innocents Shrine site in Section 18 in Queen of Heaven Cemetery located at 1400 South Wolf Road in Hillside, Illinois. Attendees should arrive there by 10:45AM. The ceremony will be performed there regardless of snow, rain, or cold. A mass will then take place at Noon at the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels, 3808 W Iowa Street in Chicago (773-486-8431).

Serge Uccetta is an OLA fire survivor and was a drum major for the Royal Airs Junior Drum and Bugle Corps. He gives the eulogy at Queen of Heaven the first Sunday in December when the Royal Airs and Royal Airs Reunion Corps alumni gather to play Taps and remember and pray for all those departed souls.

The Corps met at Queen of Heaven from 1959 to 1968. The Royal Airs was the only corps in history to win all three National Championship titles - American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the CYO in 1965. The Corps disbanded shortly after the 1968 season due to lack of funding. After a period of thirty-four years, the Corps got together again for practice in the fall of 2001 to perform in 2002 as a senior exhibition corps to honor it's founder, Sie Lurye, who was to be inducted into the Drum Corps Hall of Fame. The Royal Airs resumed their visits to Queen of Heaven in December of 2001 and have met there ever since and will meet again this coming December 1st at 11:00AM for the 66th Anniversary of that catastrophe.

The Royal Airs were founded at the Humboldt Park Boathouse in June of 1958 and were housed in three stores on Division Street and Monticello Avenue in Chicago until they moved into Connelly Post on North Avenue and Central Park in 1964.

Father Joseph Ognibene, a priest at Our Lady of the Angels, would come, whenever he could, to the Royal Air Hall on Division and Monticello at 7AM on the weekends back in the early 1960's to give us his blessings and communion before we left for a competition, especially when we were leaving for a out of state show. He came to Queen of Heaven to pray with us in 2001 and 2002 when we resumed our gatherings there. Father Joe passed away in December of 2003.

Click on the link below to view the video put together by Will Koenig of the Norwood Park Imperials and the Chicago Royal Airs Reunion Corps with photos from Will and Fred Schroeter of the Royal Airs and Royal Airs Reunion Corps and Sam DiPrima of the Alamo Post Rangers and Royal Airs with editing, contribution and photos from Amatore "Ami" Menle of the Alamo Post Rangers, Royal Airs and Royal Airs Reunion Corps. Fire photos were assembled from newspaper and magazine articles by Kirkland Burke from the Giles Yellow Jackets, Royal Airs, Chicago Cavaliers and The Royal Airs Reunion Corps.