



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara honors Persian Gulf War veteran with induction into state Senate 'Veterans Hall of Fame'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 18, 2024

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"It is an honor to induct John Tobias into the Senate Veterans Hall of Fame to ensure that his service and his commitment to area veterans will always be remembered," said Senator O'Mara.

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**Angelica, N.Y., July 18**—During the annual meeting of the Allegany County Board of Legislators earlier today at the Allegany County Fair, State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big

Flats) paid tribute to **Merle John Tobias**, a Hornell native and graduate of Alfred State College, who O'Mara selected earlier this year as his 2024 inductee into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame.

Tobias, who served in the United States Army during the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and throughout the Persian Gulf War, represented O'Mara's 58th Senate District and joined approximately 60 other veterans from throughout the state inducted into the Hall of Fame this year. A statewide Hall of Fame induction ceremony was held in Albany in May, which Tobias was unable to attend.

O'Mara said, "It is an honor to induct John Tobias into the Senate Veterans Hall of Fame to ensure that his service and his commitment to area veterans will always be remembered. I remain grateful that the New York State Senate provides this annual opportunity to salute the lives of our local veterans who have made such a difference for our communities, our state, and the United States of America. John served our nation at the end of the Cold War and throughout the Persian Gulf War with great distinction and honor. Then he came back home where he remained committed to the critical work of assisting his fellow veterans and their families."

The Senate established its online Veterans Hall of Fame in 2005 and, including this year, has inducted more than 1,000 veterans. The Hall salutes New York veterans for their service in the United States Armed Forces and their civilian accomplishments.

Tobias' full Hall of Fame biography follows:

*Merle John Tobias first served in the New York Army National Guard in Hornell before being transferred to active duty in the United States Army. He served during and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany in November 1989 and achieved the rank of Sergeant.*

*While serving in Germany, Mr. Tobias held many duties, including his role as a representative of the Army, where he met with local school students to describe his military experience and his high school activities growing up in the United States.*

*Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Mr. Tobias was transferred to the Army's 3rd Armored Division during the Persian Gulf War to serve in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. Shortly after returning to the United States, where he was stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado, Mr. Tobias was once again deployed to the Middle East to provide security for a missile complex during Operation Southern Watch.*

*Mr. Tobias left active duty and returned to the National Guard Unit in Hornell until 1998.*

*In his civilian life, Mr. Tobias served as a counselor for boys at Kinship Youth and Family Services in Steuben County, where he supervised and served as a positive role model, and also met his wife, Ann.*

*After continuing his education at Alfred State College and earning an Associate degree in Health and Human Services, he was employed at The Arc Allegany-Steuben, supervising staff and assisting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families throughout the two counties. Following his tenure at The Arc, Mr. Tobias began a career of service to veterans at the Bath VA Medical Center, where he has held numerous positions, including Social Services Assistant for homeless veterans and veterans with substance abuse challenges. Mr. Tobias states that working directly with these veterans as a Social Services Assistant has been the highlight and joy of his career.*

*Mr. Tobias is a lifetime member of VFW Post 2250 in Hornell and the recipient of numerous military and civilian awards and commendations. However, he says, "My biggest award is knowing I helped ONE person who needed it."*

O'Mara's previous Hall of Fame inductees are:

- > Philip C. Smith, a highly decorated Korean War combat veteran and well-known figure in Schuyler County government and veterans' affairs;
- > J. Arthur "Archie" Kieffer, a World War II combat veteran and a widely admired fixture in Chemung County government as the Chemung County historian;
- > Painted Post Mayor and World War II combat veteran Roswell L. "Roz" Crozier, Jr. ;

- > Anthony J. "Tony" Specchio, Sr., a distinguished Korean War veteran and widely respected for his long-standing and active service to veterans and government in Watkins Glen and throughout Schuyler County;
- > P. Earle Gleason, a lifelong Yates County resident and longtime director of the Yates County Veterans' Service Agency;
- > Warren A. Thompson, a lifelong Steuben County resident and farmer, and a stalwart in the county's civic and veterans affairs;
- > Paul C. "Digger" Vendetti of Elmira, a World War II United States Navy veteran and longtime caretaker at Woodlawn National Cemetery;
- > Richard T. "Dick" Gillespie of Penn Yan, a veteran of World War II;
- > Dennis Dennis L. "Denny" Wolfe, Sr. of Chemung County, a Vietnam War veteran and founder of the Vietnam War Museum in Elmira; and
- > Andrew Swarthout of Yates County, a highly decorated Vietnam War veteran and mainstay of many local veterans' services and organizations in the county.

Other area veterans who are Hall of Fame members are Frank C. "Fritz" Pesesky, a veteran of World War II and former director of the Chemung County Veterans Service Office (2005); William K. Kastner, a Vietnam veteran and longtime director of the Steuben County Veterans Service Agency (2006); and Robert Laskaris, a highly decorated combat veteran and well-known figure in Chemung County veterans' affairs (2008).