



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Leslie Church, Chair of the Yates County Legislature, honored in Albany as a 2025 'Woman of Distinction'

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 13, 2025

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"I am grateful and proud to have this opportunity to recognize and pay tribute to Leslie's leadership and countless contributions to the quality and strength of Yates County," said Senator O'Mara.

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Albany, N.Y., May 13—At a ceremony in the Legislative Office Building in Albany on Tuesday evening, State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats) and his Senate colleagues honored **Yates**

County Legislature Chair Leslie Church as a 2025 “Woman of Distinction.”

Over the past nearly three decades, Church has become widely known and respected as a leader in Yates County and throughout the Finger Lakes region in public service, volunteerism, and community development.

She began her distinguished career in local government in 2000 when she was appointed to the Town of Milo Planning Board. She was later elected to the Milo Town Board. In 2011, Church was elected as the first female Town of Milo Supervisor and later that year, as a member of the Yates County Legislature. She became the first woman to serve as the Vice Chair of the Yates County Legislature in 2020 and two years later, in 2022, the first woman elected Chair of the Yates County Legislature.

O'Mara said, “I am grateful and proud to have this opportunity to recognize and pay tribute to Leslie’s leadership and countless contributions to the quality and strength of Yates County. Her dedication has led her to a groundbreaking and stellar career in public service. She exemplifies the incredible importance of excellence at the grassroots level where commitment, effort, and vision make all the difference for our local communities. Leslie Church defines what it means to be a leader and an advocate for strong and successful local communities. She has made an enormous difference in many ways throughout Yates County. I am truly proud, on behalf of our entire 58th Senate District, to extend this well-deserved and well-earned tribute of appreciation, gratitude, and respect.”

Church was honored as part of the Senate’s 27th Annual “Women of Distinction” celebration and joined more than 60 other honorees representing state senatorial districts throughout New York.



In the photo above, Leslie was also joined at the ceremony by her husband, Gene, and her sons Andrew and Greg (far left).

O'Mara selected Church to represent his 58th Senate District covering all of Chemung, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, and Yates counties, and a part of Allegany County.

The Senate's annual recognition program, which began in March to coincide with Women's History Month, allows senators statewide to select one honoree from their respective legislative districts to be celebrated for their significant accomplishments, service, and contributions to the quality of life within and beyond their communities.

Church has worked to strengthen Yates County and the Finger Lakes region through a variety of roles in addition to her post as Chair of the County Legislature. She also serves as

Chair of the Keuka Watershed Intermunicipal Cooperative and Vice Chair of the Keuka Outlet Compact, both of which work to preserve and protect Keuka Lake. As a member of the County Legislature, she has contributed to the Youth Board, S2AY Rural Health Network, and Public Safety Committee, while also chairing the Human Services Committee. Her efforts have focused on improving services for the county's most vulnerable populations and advocating for better public health, social services, and overall community well-being.

She has been an active Master Gardener in the Cornell Cooperative Extension program and an MS Peer Advocate with Teva Neuroscience. In 2011, she was recognized by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society as an Inspirational Woman on the Move for her dedication to raising awareness and finding a cure for multiple sclerosis.

O'Mara's past "Women of Distinction" honorees have included:

> Carol Berry of Hornell, a longstanding regional library professional and director of the Dormann Library in Bath;

> Virginia "Ginny" Houseknecht of Watkins Glen, a longtime area Cornell Cooperative Extension educator and leader, and founder of the Southern Tier Parkinson's Disease Support Group;

> Beverly "Bev" Stamp, co-owner and operator of Lakewood Vineyards in Watkins Glen, a long-time and beloved ambassador of New York State's nationally and internationally renowned wine and grape industry;

> Lauren R. Snyder, a public health professional from Penn Yan who served as the Yates County Public Health Director for 28 years;

- > Linda Thomas, owner and operator of the Wellsburg Diner and recipient of a prestigious “Small Business Excellence Award” from the U.S. Small Business Administration;
- > Dawn R. Smith, Transition and Care Management (TCM) Program Manager at the Bath VA Medical Center and a well-known local veterans advocate;
- > Carmella Hoffmann, Owner and Operator of Sunset View Creamery in Odessa (Schuyler County);
- > Kathryn J. Boor, a native of Chemung County and former Ronald P. Lynch Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) at Cornell University;
- > Pauline “Polly” Holbrook, a longtime stalwart of civic affairs in the city of Hornell and the Canisteo Valley;
- > Natasha Thompson, former President and Chief Executive Officer of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier;
- > Nancy Kirby, a longstanding advocate and leader for small businesses and entrepreneurship throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions; and, last year,
- > Melinda Marquart, a lifelong resident of Seneca County and county’s first-ever female Undersheriff.