



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senate Disabilities Awareness Day "Achiever" Honored

CATHARINE YOUNG May 23, 2006

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State Senator Catharine "Cathy" Young (R,I,C - Olean) today honored Theresa Simon from Olean with one of this year's New York State Senate's Achievers' Award. The prestigious award recognizes an individual's ability to overcome personal physical challenges and honors his/her accomplishments on behalf of his/her community.

"The Achievers Award is an honor that recognizes the triumph of individuals over sometimes daunting physical challenges and is bestowed on those whose efforts serve as an example of courage, personal excellence and achievement for our entire community," said Senator Young.

Theresa K Simon, affectionately known as T.K. to all who have had the privilege of working with her, has faced the challenges of chronic mental illness all of her adult life. Born and raised in Olean, in rural Cattaraugus County, T.K. experienced the initial symptoms of her illness in her late teens, but was not diagnosed until her mid-twenties. At that time, she

began to receive treatment and was able to live independently and experience a variety of employment experiences in food service, construction, and factory labor while living in various communities in the US.

T.K. returned to Olean in 1984 to be closer to her family and was able to maintain her mental health status through services from several community providers. She began to take an interest in the local service delivery system and began to advocate for herself and others. By 1990 she had become very active at the local level in advocating for systems change and peer-driven services. She was appointed to the Cattaraugus County Community Services Board in 1994 and became the co-chair of the Mental Health Subcommittee in 1995. That same year, she received the Mental Health Service Award from the Mental Health Association of Cattaraugus County and was recognized by the Clarkson Center in Buffalo with the Courage to Come Back Award.

Following those recognition's, T.K. immersed herself in training opportunities that would advance her many advocacy efforts. She participated in peer advocacy and empowerment training, attended extensive presentations on boardsmanship, and completed the studies necessary for certification as a mental health therapy aide.

T.K. Has attended and participated in state and national conferences addressing mental health issues and has presented on boardsmanship and board roles in the oversight of mental health services.

T.K. has also been a member of the Olean Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution since 1984, serving as secretary and in her current role of Regent of the local chapter.

Ms. Simon has met the challenges of mental illness unflinchingly through much of her life.

She has experienced the negative consequences mental illness often brings including stigmatization and de-valuation. She has, however, pushed those things aside and focused on advocating for positive change in the form of allowing people with mental illness to directly advocate for having a voice in defining the services and support they need to function as independently as possible. T.K. welcomes the opportunity to challenge political leaders and service providers to listen to the people they serve in order to spend valuable public funds as effectively as possible. More importantly, she is always there for parents, children, and peers to help them navigate the care and support system as effectively as possible.

The New York State Senate Achievers Awards are presented each year in conjunction with Senate Disability Awareness Day, an annual event sponsored by the Senate to raise public awareness of the efforts and accomplishments of citizens with physical disabilities.