



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Local Heroes Finally Earn Diplomas

CATHARINE YOUNG December 20, 2010

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**CUBA, NY** – Two area veterans who answered their Country’s call to military service before graduating from high school received long overdue diplomas during a special ceremony Monday at Cuba-Rushford High School.

Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C – Olean) was joined by Cuba-Rushford Superintendent Kevin Shanley and Belfast Central Superintendent Judy May to present high school diplomas through New York State’s Operation Recognition in honor of Marine Corps Sergeant Lester Baker, West Clarksville, and deceased Army Air Forces Corporal June E. Lockwood, who was a Cuba native.

“The dedication displayed by these two patriots is exemplary. The experiences and skills they learned in the defense

of our freedom have given them, and all of our veterans, unique knowledge and special insights that most others never could attain. These diplomas reflect our pride and gratitude for their sacrifice and bravery,” said Senator Young.

Sgt. Baker was a senior at Belfast Central School in 1962 when he joined the Marines during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He served as an artillery operator and ran a security platoon in Vietnam. The recipient of two Purple Hearts, his stint ended after six years when he returned home to his wife, and nine-month-old baby.

Although he considered rejoining for another tour of duty, “I hadn’t met my son yet, and I wanted to come back,” Sgt. Baker remembered.

“Receiving my diploma today is a great thing. I’m ecstatic and emotional, and I don’t get emotional often because Marines aren’t supposed to. Once a Marine, always a Marine,” he said.

Cpl. Lockwood was awarded her diploma posthumously. She quit high school to enlist in the Army Air Forces during World War II after her brother, David, was killed in Belgium. She served as a “Flying Medic”, a medical services technician at bases in Mississippi, Texas, Indiana and Florida. Cpl. Lockwood’s daughter, Nora Wilson-Wheeler, and son, John Wilson, received the diploma on her behalf.

Ms. Wilson-Wheeler said that her mother always regretted not earning her high school diploma.

“Mom finally graduated today. It was a long time coming, and I’m sure she’d be happy about it,” she said.

The daughter said she would stop by the cemetery to place a copy of the diploma on Cpl. Lockwood’s headstone to honor her memory.

Through New York’s Operation Recognition program, thousands of men and women who willingly set aside their education in order to defend the United States are eligible to receive their high school diplomas. Veterans of World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War all qualify for this program that was established by the State Legislature and Governor George E. Pataki.

“Operation Recognition is an opportunity for our servicemen and women to claim their diplomas, and it provides the

residents of New York a chance to thank our veterans for all they have done for our great Nation,” said Senator Young.

Operation Recognition helps recipients secure civilian jobs traditionally closed off to those without high school training. New York veterans also may use their honorary high school degrees to apply for postsecondary education, whether vocational training, or campus or online degrees or certificates.

Interested veterans should bring their honorable discharge certificate or letter to any New York State school that issues general or local diplomas. There is no fee for this service. Candidates do not need to show evidence of attendance at a school in New York State. They only need to affirm in writing that they do not possess a high school diploma. Candidates possessing a high school equivalency (or GED) diploma also are eligible.

For more information, contact Senator Young’s office at 716-372-4901.

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