



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

Senator Grisanti Names Jack O'Connor 'Veteran Of The Month'

MARK GRISANTI March 5, 2014

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**



O'Connor, a resident of the Village of Kenmore, becomes the second of what will be twelve recipients of an honor presented by Senator Grisanti following an application and nomination process coordinated by staff members who work in Grisanti's veterans liaison office.

"I am happy to recognize Jack for his outstanding service to his country," said Senator Grisanti. "He is one of our outstanding veterans living in Western New York who is a positive role model for us all. I encourage all of my constituents to look up to and admire Jack for all

that he has done for his nation.”

O'Connor volunteered for the Vietnam draft in 1968 after graduating from Canisius College with a bachelors of science degree in physiology. After attending basic training he was assigned with the 82nd Airborne and sent to Vietnam, where he served in 1969 and 1970 as an infantryman and clerk.

For his service during the war, O'Connor was awarded the Bronze Star Meritorious Service Medal, and Combat Infantry Badge. After returning home from Vietnam and being honorably discharged, he returned to Buffalo and Canisius College, where he earned a masters of science degree in counseling.

The Veterans Treatment Court, which originated in Buffalo in 2008, is presided over by Judge Robert Russell. The court has several veteran mentors, each bringing with them a wealth of knowledge and varying degrees of experience who play a key position in the function of the court. By giving these veteran defendants the opportunity to be guided by another veteran who they can relate with, these mentors have provided an essential function to the court program. In fact, the program's success is often attributed to the contributions of these volunteers.

Having served as the director of Medicaid for Erie County's Department of Social Services, O'Connor was instrumental in the creation of the court's mentorship program. Veterans who need help but are not necessary violating the law, can still go through the program. Together with Judge Russell's leadership, the VA's participation and the contributions of volunteer Veteran mentors, the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court Program has successfully graduated dozens of veterans who have steered their lives away from the traps that many others before them have fallen into in the absence of such a program.

The first ever Hank Pirowski, Jr. Award was presented to O'Connor for his efforts as mentor coordinator in the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court. He has been instrumental in building volunteer veteran mentor programs in Veterans Treatment Courts all over the country.

"I realize why we are mentors," says O'Connor. "We not only save the veteran, we save the family, the mom and dad, the grandparents and the children. That, my friends, is why we are mentors."

O'Connor is a member of the American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign War, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter No. 77, and the Advisory Board of the Veterans Administration of Buffalo. He is the father of three daughters and five grandchildren.

For more information about Senator Grisanti's "Veterans Of The Month" recognition program, visit www.senatormarkgrisanti.com and click on the "Veterans" tab or call (716) 854-8705.