



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

## ABPRL CAUCUS WEEKEND - James "Rocky" Robinson, Founder of Bed-Stuy Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Receives the Community Service Award

SENATOR VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY February 15, 2016



"...A vital role in the betterment of underserved communities of color."

**James "Rocky" Robinson, Jr.** was born on July 15, 1940, in Marietta North Carolina, and moved to **Brooklyn, NY**. After attending Eastern District High School, Rocky served 5 years in the United States Army. His Army duty included serving as a member of the honor Guard posted at the Arlington National Cemetery, where he stood guard during the visits of Jackie Kennedy and her children to John F. Kennedy's grave.

After serving in the military, Rocky joined New York City's Emergency Medical Service (EMS) where he served the city for more than 30 years before retiring in 2000. His career with EMS was marked by accomplishments. In 1977 he was promoted to Lieutenant, and in 1994 he became a Captain. Through his work with EMS, Rocky witnessed the crises in emergency medical services in New York's minority communities. To respond to this crisis, in 1988 Rocky founded the Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps (BSVAC), America's first minority volunteer ambulance corps.

The remarkable story of Rocky and BSVAC has been told in print, on the radio, and on television. BSVAC first began operations with no ambulance and no volunteers, at a point when the response time in Bed-Stuy for city ambulances averaged about 30 minutes. In the beginning, Rocky and his partner, Spec. Joe Perez responded on foot to the calls they heard on their police radio. Eventually BSVAC established a record-breaking ambulance service that has responded to over 400 emergency calls a month with an average response time of less than 4 minutes.

Through BSVAC Rocky has worked tirelessly to help the Bed-Stuy community. Rocky designed a comprehensive emergency medical training program including Trauma Troopers, First Responders, and Youth Corps. To date, thousands of local residents have been trained to save lives in emergencies. In addition, hundreds of young people have completed the youth Corps program (basic EMT training), and almost 100 of the graduates have become EMTs or have otherwise pursued careers in medicine as nurses, physician's assistants, or doctors.

Although he has concentrated his efforts on Bed-Stuy, Rocky has reached out to other minority communities from Harlem to L.A., providing emergency medical training and assistance in setting up programs. Closer to home, in 1993 Rocky responded to the first World Trade Center with BSVAC, and he also responded on 9/11 when BSVAC volunteers saved a

firefighter's life.

Rocky's ability to inspire led to his being chosen to address the Republican National Convention in Houston, Texas in 1994. For his remarkable accomplishments and ongoing efforts, Rocky has received numerous awards, including: the Robin Hood Foundation Hero of the Year Award, the New York City Hero Award, the American Institute of Public Service Jefferson Award, the Points of Light Award (awarded by President George Bush), and the Maxwell House Hero Search Award. Among the many honors he has received, Rocky was selected to carry the Olympic torch down Fifth Avenue in New York City, enroute to Atlanta, for the 1996 Olympics. Rocky's status as a hero was even recognized by the children of Wilkes County Elementary School in North Carolina, who named him as their Black Hero in 1998 (choosing him by a landslide over other candidates, including Michael Jordan.)

Of all the honors and awards that Rocky has earned, he describes his greatest reward as the satisfaction he enjoys from seeing young people succeed in medical careers after training with BSVAC. On Sunday, October 19, 2014 Commander Robinson was honored by the Fallen Firefighters and the Leroy W. Smith Foundation named after a firefighter who was lost during the tragic events of 9/11.

Commander James "Rocky" Robinson also prides himself on the fact that whenever and wherever disaster strikes, he and his volunteers are ready at a moment's notice. During his 26 years at the helm, BSVAC has responded to the WTC bombings, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Sandy, and were the first medical support team to reach Haiti after the earthquake in 2010. BSVAC was the first on the scene for the Brooklyn officers Liu and Chen that were shot and killed in Bedford Stuyvesant in 2015.

Commander Robinson has received a number of citations and awards from the NYS Assembly and the NYC city council. He has received his certification from the National

Association of Emergency Medical Service Educators and his humanitarian doctrine.

In recent developments, Rocky and his BSVAC staff started a new round of EMT training courses and Rocky is extremely excited at the chance to train the next generation of EMTs.

Commander Robinson's goal is to unite all people regardless of race, religion or lifestyle for one thing, and that is to save lives.