



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Saluting our Veterans

Senator Patty Ritchie

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Our region is home to nearly 30,000 selfless men and women who proudly wore the uniform and fought for our nation's freedom. Every time I think about the adversity our military veterans faced during their service, and the sacrifices they and their families have made, I am inspired. I also know I am not alone.

This region, our home, is one that takes tremendous pride in our veterans and their families. We have continually made it a point to show that we truly do care, and we prove it by continually finding ways to say 'Thank you'. Our veteran population has always had our back. We must repay that by ensuring we have theirs.

The National Salute to Veteran Patient Program works to encourage people to reach out to veterans in their communities. Each day, more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. armed services are cared for in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, outpatient clinics, individual and nursing homes across the country. The VA helps those who have sacrificed so much to keep us safe.

In order to provide the very best care, the VA is looking for your help. Many of these centers and clinics need volunteers. They need every day people who want to say 'thank you' with the gift of their time. To take part, you can contact your nearest VA Medical Center, including the VA outpatient clinics in Oswego and Watertown.

In addition to programs like this, I continue to work to help our veterans across our region. In last year's state budget, I secured \$185,000 in special funding to help continue programs in Jefferson County that aim to help veterans and our active-duty troops, including those serving with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division on Fort Drum, struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other combat-related illnesses.

These funds will help a variety of centers, ensuring veterans don't have to travel several hours for appointments. Funding is shared between River Hospital's Community Wellness Program and the VETS Peer-to-Peer Outreach Center in Watertown, which oversees the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program for Veterans.

This marks the fifth consecutive year I have been able to secure funding for both programs. To date, it has been my honor to deliver nearly \$1 million to help provide local veterans and active duty troops with services that help them cope with combat-related illnesses.

In addition, it is also our mission as civilians to never forget the selfless sacrifices our nation's heroes have made. That is why every year, I recognize veterans in our region during my annual "Veterans Hall of Fame" ceremony. Last year, I honored 27 local veterans. I will be calling for nominations soon for this year's ceremony.

If we all do our part, we can take care of our veterans and show them just how much their service means to us. To volunteer, and for more information on the National Salute to Veterans Patients Program, go to the website <https://www.volunteer.va.gov>. If you are or know a veteran in need of assistance, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.