



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of September 6, 2021 ~ 'Singling out the grassroots heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic'

THOMAS F. O'MARA September 7, 2021

| ISSUE: **NEW YORK STATE WOMEN OF DISTINCTION**



Natasha Thompson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, was honored in a virtual ceremony on Thursday, August 26, as a 2021 New York State Senate "Woman of Distinction." She represented our 58th Senate District as part of the Senate's 23rd Annual "Women of Distinction" celebration and was joined by more than 60 other honorees representing state senatorial districts from throughout New York.

Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "Singling out the grassroots heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic"

Since March 2020 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that has turned (and continues to turn) life as we knew it upside down, one thing has remained constant and steady: people, from all walks and all stations of life, stepping up to help.

Throughout the past nearly 20 months, I have said it, wrote it, tweeted it, and shared it face to face, and it's worth stating again: While no single small list can ever begin to cover everyone, let's never forget the doctors, nurses and other health care professionals and staff, public health departments, emergency services personnel and first responders, corrections officers, business leaders, bank and credit union employees, postal workers and bus drivers, transportation and sanitation crews, delivery drivers and truckers, direct care workers, service organizations, educators, librarians, farmers, government officials at every level, the men and women of our military, an army of other essential employees and, of course, incredibly selfless volunteers -- throughout the public and private sectors -- who have kept on working to combat and control this threat, and provide diligent public outreach.

I commend their commitment and dedication. I have also appreciated every opportunity along the way to single out and pay a particular tribute to a regional hero, and I did so again recently.

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For over two decades, the Senate's Women of Distinction program has been one of our most successful and meaningful efforts to recognize citizens making a difference across our region and state. As individual senators, we look forward to this chance to help celebrate our honorees for their significant accomplishments, service, and contributions to the quality of life within and beyond their communities.

Prior to COVID-19, the Senate held an in-person awards ceremony at the Legislative Office Building in Albany. Last year, we honored our Women of Distinction through a virtual tribute. This year's celebration was also done virtually and is available for viewing on my Senate website, www.omara.nysenate.gov.

To say the least, it is an impressive storyline of achievement.

Natasha Thompson represents a remarkable commitment to our communities that highlights her recognition this year as a Woman of Distinction. For more than two decades, she has remained devoted to a life's work of serving those in need throughout the Southern Tier region and I am proud to pay this tribute to her contributions as a leader and a tireless advocate.

She has been with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier since 2001 and in her current position as President and CEO since 2008. She began her career as an Americorps*VISTA volunteer at the Rhode Island Community Food Bank in 1997.

Under Natasha's leadership, the Food Bank was recognized in 2017 with Feeding America's prestigious "Food Bank of the Year" award.

In 2020, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier saw an unprecedented increase in demand for food due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many food banks across the nation, Natasha and her team had to completely shift the Southern Tier's entire operation to respond quickly to fast-changing community needs while ensuring the safety of staff, volunteers, and clients. They and their amazing network of dedicated volunteers successfully navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The Food Bank of the Southern Tier ended the year with a record-breaking distribution of 17.6 million pounds of food, a 40% increase over 2019!

It has been a truly remarkable lifeline.

The brief biography that accompanies Natasha's "Woman of Distinction" tribute may have stated it best: "Ms. Thompson is an optimist who believes that food brings people to the table, both figuratively and literally, where conversations happen, relationships take root, and communities are transformed."

Natasha's trademark optimism, selflessness, and unwavering belief in the Food Bank's mission have always stood out, however her leadership guiding the work of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has been inspiring and an undeniable foundation of hope for residents and families across this region.

I am truly pleased this year, on behalf of the 58th Senate District, to be able to extend this well-deserved and well-earned tribute of appreciation, gratitude, and respect. Thank you, Natasha.

September is Hunger Action Month. To find out more, including ways to help, visit the Food Bank of the Southern Tier at www.foodbankst.org or call 607-796-6061.

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