



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of July 11, 2022 -- 'Never forget those who have served'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 11, 2022

| ISSUE: **VETERANS HALL OF FAME**



We take this opportunity to salute the lives of veterans who have made such a difference for our local communities, our state, and the United States of America.

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, "Never forget those who have served"

Over the July 4th weekend in the city of Elmira, local veterans and members of the community at large took the solemn and very meaningful opportunity to visit "The Moving Wall," a traveling, half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Thanks to the efforts of Chapter 803 of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) in Elmira, The Moving Wall was brought to the Southern Tier and available for viewing for six days at Eldridge Park.

Throughout those six days, volunteers, including many veterans, took part in a continuous reading of the 58,318 names on the Wall.

It was quite an experience. Hundreds turned out. In the words of one visiting veteran, "The wall is important because it's really to help people never forget."

Never forget.

It was a great privilege for me to take part in the opening ceremony for the arrival of The Moving Wall on June 29, where I had the opportunity to honor the memory of all Vietnam veterans, to thank them for their service, and to salute one local Vietnam War veteran in particular.

In 2005, the New York State Senate established an online Veterans Hall of Fame and, including this year, has inducted nearly 500 veterans from throughout the state. Our Hall of Fame salutes New York veterans for their service in the United States Armed Forces and their civilian accomplishments. Each year, senators select one veteran for the honor from within each of our respective legislative districts.

It is one of our most meaningful tributes.

This year, Dennis L. "Denny" Wolfe, Sr. of Chemung County, a well-known area Vietnam War veteran and founder of the Vietnam War Museum in Elmira, was chosen to represent our 58th Senate District in the Veterans Hall of Fame.

A statewide, virtual induction ceremony was held on Memorial Day. We followed up locally by honoring Denny as part of the opening ceremony for The Moving Wall on June 29th.

Born and raised in Elmira, Denny was drafted into the United States Army in January 1966. He served with the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the first full Army division deployed to Vietnam, from 1967 to 1968, as a Helicopter Crew Chief, including throughout the Tet Offensive in 1968.

Denny returned to Elmira after being discharged from the Army in 1968, where he has devoted his life to assisting and honoring area veterans.

He is a charter member of Chapter 803 of the Vietnam Veterans of America. In 1993, Denny conceived the idea for what would become the Vietnam War Museum at 1200 Davis Street in Elmira, approximately one-half mile south of the Woodlawn National Cemetery.

The Museum held its grand opening on May 2, 2009. Honoring the memory of Major Robert H. Schuler, Jr., who was shot down over North Vietnam on October 15, 1965, the Museum is dedicated solely to the Vietnam War in tribute to the sacrifices and service of all Vietnam Veterans.

It's a great Southern Tier attraction. Noted for its distinctive awning, facade, and row of flags, the Museum is staffed mostly by veteran volunteers and is open to the public free of charge.

Denny continues to serve as the Museum Director. Defined by his deep commitment, steadfast effort, labor of love, and ongoing vision for the Museum he founded, Denny Wolfe is a proud representative and keeper of the history, sacrifice and service of America's Vietnam Veterans for future generations.

It has been an honor and a privilege to induct Denny Wolfe into the Senate Veterans Hall of Fame. Denny has done anything and everything he could through the Vietnam War Museum he founded in Elmira to ensure that the legacy and the service of America's Vietnam War veterans will always be remembered. I am grateful that the New York State Senate will take this step to ensure that Denny's own service and his lifelong commitment to area veterans will also be remembered for generations to come.

The same has been true for each of my Veterans Hall of Fame inductees through the years, including:

> Philip C. Smith, a highly decorated Korean War combat veteran and well-known figure in Schuyler County government and veterans' affairs;

> J. Arthur "Archie" Kieffer, a World War II combat veteran and a widely admired fixture in Chemung County government as the Chemung County historian;

> Painted Post Mayor and World War II combat veteran Roswell L. "Roz" Crozier, Jr.;

> Anthony J. "Tony" Specchio, Sr., a distinguished Korean War veteran and widely respected for his long-standing and active service to veterans and government in Watkins Glen and throughout

Schuyler County;

> P. Earle Gleason, a Vietnam War combat veteran, lifelong Yates County resident, and longtime director of the Yates County Veterans' Service Agency;

> Warren A. Thompson, a World War II veteran, lifelong Steuben County resident and farmer, and a stalwart in the county's civic and veterans affairs;

> Paul C. "Digger" Vendetti of Elmira, a World War II United States Navy veteran and longtime caretaker at Woodlawn National Cemetery; and, last year,

> Richard T. "Dick" Gillespie of Penn Yan, a veteran of World War II who flew a B-17 Boeing Bomber (known as the "Flying Fortress") on 21 missions over Germany.

We take this opportunity to salute the lives of veterans who have made such a difference for our local communities, our state, and the United States of America.

Denny Wolfe courageously served our nation in Vietnam and then returned home where he has devoted his life to tirelessly working to honor and assist his fellow veterans and strengthen our community.

I am glad to take this opportunity to express our collective gratitude and respect, and to never forget.

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