

VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

Dear Friends,

The New York State Senate is proud to honor and induct into our Veterans Hall of Fame veterans who have distinguished themselves in military and/or civilian life. As our Nation prepares to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States of America, we reflect with profound gratitude on the enduring spirit of service that has defined our country since its founding.

We are reminded that the story of America is, at its heart, a story of service. Throughout our history, the men and women of the Armed Forces have stepped forward in moments of great peril and profound uncertainty to defend our Constitution, safeguard our freedoms, and uphold the values that bind us as Americans.

We honor this year's 2026 New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame inductees and express our sincere appreciation for their service to our State and Nation. With deep appreciation for the generations of New Yorkers who have donned the uniform of the United States, we are honored to recognize these patriots and their families whose sacrifices make that service possible.



Andrea Stewart-Cousins

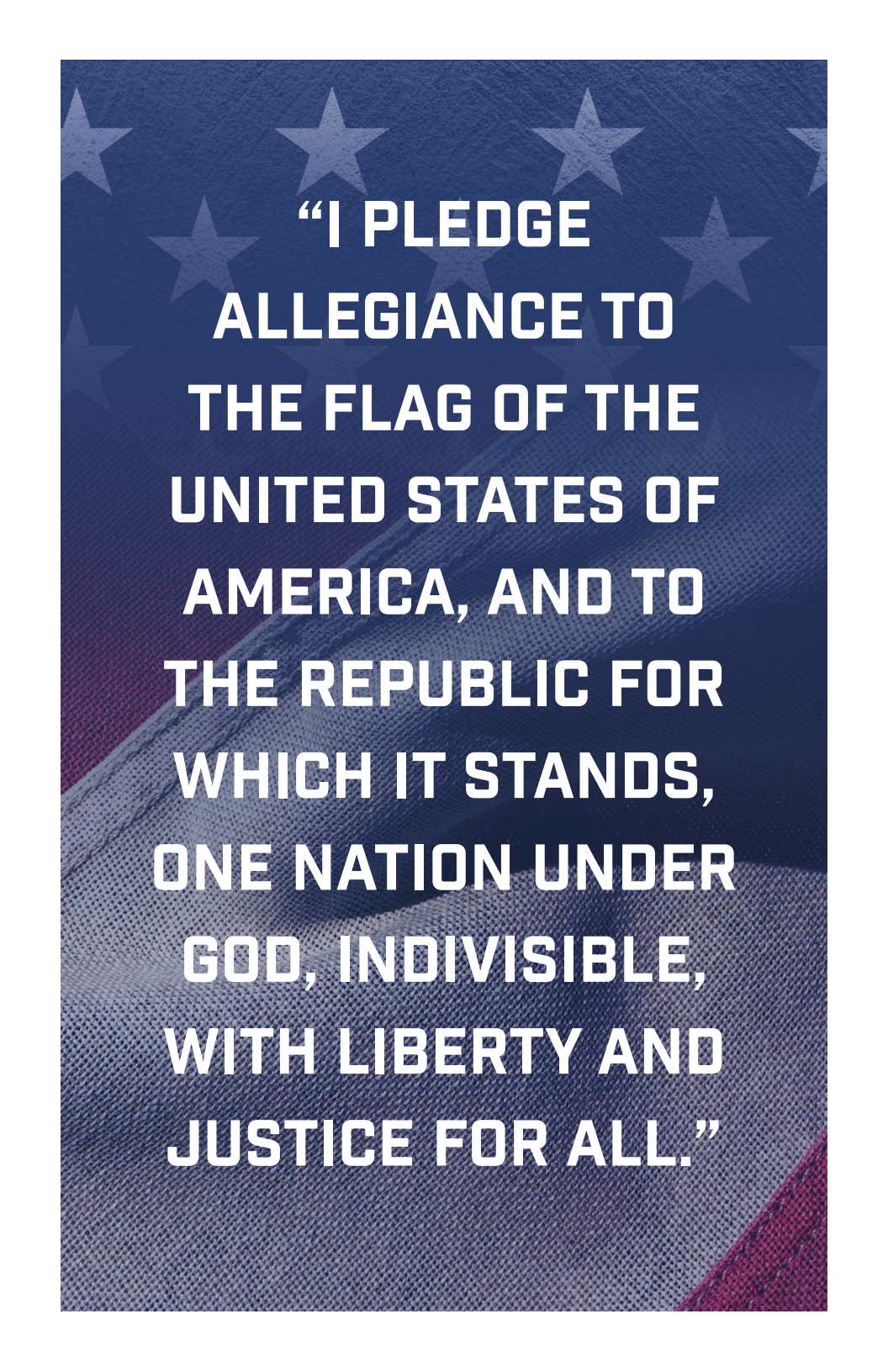
Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore
NYS Senate Majority Leader



Rob-G. Ort

Senator Robert G. Ort
Minority Leader



The background of the image is a close-up, textured view of the American flag, showing the blue field with white stars and the red and white stripes. The text is overlaid on this background.

**“I PLEDGE
ALLEGIANCE TO
THE FLAG OF THE
UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA, AND TO
THE REPUBLIC FOR
WHICH IT STANDS,
ONE NATION UNDER
GOD, INDIVISIBLE,
WITH LIBERTY AND
JUSTICE FOR ALL.”**

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LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING THE 2026 NEW YORK STATE SENATE VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

HONORING the distinguished veterans from the State of New York upon the occasion of their induction into the New York State Senate 2026 Veterans Hall of Fame

WHEREAS, Members of the Armed Services from the State of New York, who have served so valiantly and honorably in wars in which this country's freedom was at stake, as well as in the preservation of peace in peacetime, deserve a special salute from this Legislative Body; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to honor the distinguished veterans from the State of New York upon the occasion of their induction into the New York State Senate 2026 Veterans Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, The New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame inductees are members of any branch of the United States Armed Forces, which include Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, and Marine Corps; these exceptional men and women are chosen for this prestigious honor based on either service in combat or notable work performed after discharge from the service; and

WHEREAS, The 2026 inductees include: Richard V. Acritelli, Joseph Austin, Robin Dana Blocker, Jerry C. Bowman, Susan Branam, Joseph Canzoneri, David Crum, Sandy Davis, John DePerno, Antonio Diaz, Lori Dispenza, Christopher J. Douglas, Modesto Figueroa, John F. Fox, William Frank, Jr., Eugene Gerrard, Jaime Gonzalez, Colden Grant, Nathan B. Grant, Susan Herson, MD, Joseph Hunt, Willie Jackson, Lou Jerome, John Harry Kellers, Jason D. Knapp, Eugene Loparco, Frank Marcinek, Jezebel McIntosh, Ronnie McNair, Kevin C. Meggett, Michael R. Militello, George M. Morreale, John A. Neggia, Paul Oleksiw, Denis E. Oliver, Justin Young Park, Juan Parra, Martin Pedraza, Dominick Pepe, Massiel Pimentel, Joscelyn Ralph, Rafael Rodriguez Jr., Diego Rubio, Karleen Susan Savidge, John Schroeder, John Shott, Brian Sillik, Donee' Smalls, Luis Soltero-Rodriguez, Marie-Michelle Strah, PhD, Larry Strassner, Michael Sweeney, Manolin Tirado, Michael Carmine Vellucci, Frederico Alexander Watson, Ron Watson, Gary A. Wood, and Michael Zemser; and



WHEREAS, The banner of freedom will always wave over our beloved New York and all of America, the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave; and

WHEREAS, The freedoms and security we cherish as Americans come at a very high price for those serving in the military in times of conflict; it is fitting and proper that we, who are the beneficiaries of those who risk their lives, must never forget the courage with which these men and women served their country; and

WHEREAS, Our Nation's veterans deserve to be recognized, commended, and thanked by the people of the State of New York for their service and for their dedication to their communities, their State, and their Nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor the distinguished veterans from the State of New York upon the occasion of their induction into the New York State Senate 2026 Veterans Hall of Fame; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the 2026 inductees.



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2026

HONOREES

NEW YORK STATE SENATE



VETERANS

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RICHARD V. ACRITELLI

Richard V. Acritelli served in the New York Air National Guard and United States Army Reserve and achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant.

Mr. Acritelli began his military career in 1994 when he enlisted in the Army Reserve, where he served as a Transportation Specialist. In this role, he was responsible for operating heavy military vehicles and transporting essential supplies, including fuel and ammunition, in support of operational readiness. His service required discipline, reliability, and a strong commitment to mission success.

In 1998, Mr. Acritelli continued his military service by joining the New York Air National Guard, where he served until 2003 and attained the rank of Staff Sergeant. Throughout his military career, he demonstrated professionalism, leadership, and an unwavering dedication to his fellow service members and his country.

Following his military service, Mr. Acritelli devoted himself to honoring veterans and preserving military history. He is not only an advocate, but has also played an active role in numerous veterans' organizations and initiatives, working to ensure that the sacrifices and experiences of those who served are remembered and respected.

Mr. Acritelli has held numerous leadership roles in veteran and historical organizations, educational outreach, and public programming designed to connect communities with the stories and lessons of military service.

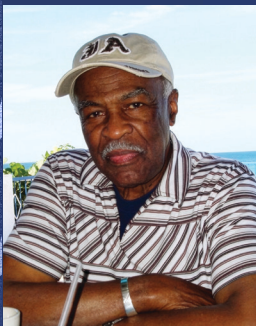
In addition to his advocacy work, Mr. Acritelli has made significant contributions as a military historian, author, and educator. Through his research, writing, and public engagement, he has helped preserve the legacy of American service members for future generations. His work has strengthened public understanding of military history and deepened appreciation for the courage and sacrifice of veterans.

Mr. Acritelli's induction into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame reflects his honorable service in uniform and his continued commitment to ensuring that veterans are recognized, supported, and remembered. His dedication to service—both in military uniform and as a civilian advocate—exemplifies the highest ideals of duty, honor, and community.



RICHARD V. ACRITELLI WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ANTHONY H. PALUMBO

2026



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JOSEPH AUSTIN

Joseph Austin is a proud United States Army veteran of WWII. He served as a Tuskegee Airman, breaking barriers and paving the way for future generations of African American servicemen and women. His military service reflected both courage and excellence during a pivotal era in American history.

Mr. Austin stands as a remarkable example of dedication, resilience, and service to both country and community. His life's work spans groundbreaking scientific achievement, military service, aerospace innovation, and decades of civic involvement.

A graduate of Taylor Allderdice High School, Mr. Austin earned honors before continuing his education at the University of Pittsburgh, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and a Bachelor of Science in Engineering. To support his education and family, he worked for 10 years with the United States Postal Service.

During his time at the University of Pittsburgh, Mr. Austin served as a laboratory technician for Dr. Jonas Salk, contributing to the historic development of the first polio vaccine in 1955 — an achievement that changed the course of public health worldwide.

Mr. Austin later embarked on a distinguished 30-plus-year career as an electrical engineer at Grumman Aircraft Corporation. He played an integral role in the development of the Lunar Excursion Module used in the historic Apollo 11 mission—the first landing on the Moon in 1969. He also contributed to the development of the F-14 fighter aircraft and numerous other major aerospace programs, helping to advance American innovation in aviation and space exploration.

Mr. Austin is a devoted husband to Marilyn Austin, with whom he has shared over 73 years of marriage. Together, they raised four children, all graduates of Freeport High School who went on to pursue higher education. A steadfast family man, he instilled in his children strong values of discipline, education, service, and integrity.

A long-standing member of the Nassau Mineral Club, Mr. Austin has dedicated years to sharing his passion for mineralogy. He regularly volunteered to give lectures on meteorites and remains an active member today. Mr. Austin developed a talent for crafting gemstone jewelry, creating over 300 semiprecious stone pendants, nearly all of which he gifted to family and friends as tokens of love and generosity. The Nassau Mineral Club recently honored his decades of service with the publication of a commemorative book documenting his lectures on meteorites, titled "Meteorites: Messengers from Space."

As an African American man who faced countless incidents of racial discrimination throughout his life, Mr. Austin never allowed adversity to define or deter him. Instead, he met each challenge with dignity, perseverance, and excellence. His life embodies resilience, brilliance, and unwavering commitment to doing what's right.



JOSEPH AUSTIN WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR SIELA A. BYNOE

2026



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ROBIN DANA BLOCKER

Robin Dana Blocker served in the United States Navy and achieved the rank of Specialist E-4.

Mr. Blocker graduated in 1976 from Laurel Park High School in Martinsville, Virginia. He returned to New York in 1977 and was employed by the United States Customs Service during the summers of 1978 and 1979. He graduated from CSI with an Associate of Arts degree and was later hired full-time by U.S. Customs at 6 World Trade Center.

From 1984 to 1987, Mr. Blocker was enlisted in the Navy, and he received an honorable discharge. He survived two bombings at the World Trade Center, but 9/11 changed his life and career. In recognition of his quick thinking and leadership on 9/11, he received the Commissioner's Award in Washington, D.C., along with a promotion to Seized Property Specialist. In 2020, Mr. Blocker was promoted to Supervisor, and he retired in January 2023 after over 43 years of service.

Currently, he serves as a Deacon at the Brighton Heights Reformed Church in St. George on Staten Island.

Mr. Blocker is President of the 369th Veterans Association Inc., Richmond District, a federally chartered non-profit organization made up of former servicemen and women who have served in all branches of the Armed Forces. The Association was founded on October 19, 1953, by a small group of veterans who served with the 369th Anti-Aircraft Artillery and its affiliated units during World War II. In May 1954, the Association was incorporated under the laws of the State of New York.

The Association's objectives are to support all patriotic endeavors of the United States, stimulate the public interest, enhance the welfare of the community, and help mentally, morally, and physically prepare the youth of our community.

Mr. Blocker and the Association's community endeavors include increasing voter registration, sponsoring the Youth Honor Guards, promoting and contributing to the Scouts of Staten Island, college tour programs for high school seniors, Autism Awareness initiatives, and the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The Association also visits the elderly who are homebound.

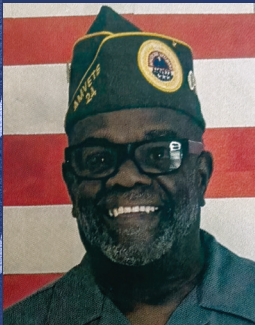
Mr. Blocker credits people, both past and present, who have guided him on this memorable journey. He is forever grateful and humbled by the opportunity to serve.

He has been married to his wife, Terry Javois-Blocker, for 38 years. He is blessed with four children and seven grandchildren.



ROBIN DANA BLOCKER WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JESSICA SCARCELLA-SPANTON

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JERRY C. BOWMAN

Jerry C. Bowman is a United States Army veteran who achieved the rank of Sergeant. His courage, commitment, and lifelong service have distinguished him as one of New York State's most remarkable veterans.

A proud son of Buffalo, Mr. Bowman is the fourth of eight children. He followed the guidance of his older brother, Carl, and enlisted in the Army shortly after graduating from East High School, setting him on a path of profound sacrifice and enduring impact.

After training at Fort Dix, Mr. Bowman deployed directly to Vietnam. When he landed at Bien Hoa on October 3, 1967, he and his fellow soldiers were met with incoming mortar fire, forcing them to sprint for cover before the plane even shut down. Mr. Bowman served nearly three years in Vietnam, rising to the rank of Sergeant and earning a reputation for bravery, resourcefulness, and steady leadership.

Assigned to the 4th Psychological Warfare Battalion and attached to the 3rd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, the famed "Third Herd," Mr. Bowman experienced some of the war's most grueling combat. In the jungles of Dak To, he carried out PSYOP missions, including broadcasting recorded messages and music to undermine enemy morale. During one mission in a Montagnard village, his quick thinking under heavy enemy fire helped protect both soldiers and civilians. He spent nearly a month among the villagers before a daring rescue by South Korean forces.

Shortly after, Mr. Bowman was reassigned to Advisory Team 28 and found himself in the midst of the Tet Offensive, operating an 81-millimeter mortar for the first time. After 11 months and 27 days of combat, he returned home decorated with the Army Commendation Medal and the Air Medal.

Once home, he enrolled at the University at Buffalo, where he founded the Third World Veterans Alliance. Mr. Bowman went on to a long-distinguished career in public service, working in drop-in centers, alcohol rehabilitation programs, homeless initiatives, and as a Veteran Representative with the New York State Department of Labor.

A dedicated member of Johnetta R. Cole AMVETS Post No. 24, Mr. Bowman has spent decades honoring veterans, educating youth, and uplifting his community. He is recognized for a lifetime defined by service, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to others.



JERRY C. BOWMAN WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR APRIL N.M. BASKIN

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SUSAN BRANAM

Susan Branam served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Captain.

Raised in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, Ms. Branam attended the University of Pittsburgh, where she joined the United States Army through the ROTC and earned a three-year academic scholarship.

Upon graduating in 1993 — at a time when women were first being admitted into combat aviation — she became one of the pioneering women to complete Combat Aviation Training and advanced combat skills. During her service, from 1993 to 2000, Ms. Branam flew attack helicopters, conducted missions worldwide, and served in the United States Cavalry.

Today, Ms. Branam is a disabled veteran, a dedicated public servant, and a proud mother of three. She is an accredited Veterans Service Officer with the American Legion and holds lifetime memberships with the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion.

Ms. Branam is actively involved with several organizations, including the Homes for Heroes Board, the New York State Nursing Home Board, the Hudson Valley VA Montrose Stakeholders Board, the American Legion Auxiliary, and the Rockland-Orange District Council of the Jewish War Veterans.

Ms. Branam serves as Director of the Rockland County Veterans Service Agency. She is known as a tireless advocate, helping veterans connect to critical services such as transportation, counseling, healthcare, education benefits, housing, and rehabilitation. She is also a valued contributor to Senator Weber's Veterans Advisory Council.

Prior to her current role, Ms. Branam served as an adjunct professor of psychology at Rockland Community College. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Pittsburgh, a Master of Arts in Psychology from the Georgia School of Professional Psychology, and a Post-Master's Certificate in Marriage and Family Counseling from Northcentral University.

Ms. Branam is recognized for her selfless service to our Nation and her dedication to supporting veterans throughout Rockland County and beyond.



SUSAN BRANAM WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR BILL WEBER

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JOSEPH CANZONERI

Joseph Canzoneri served in the United States Coast Guard and was on active duty during the Korean War. He achieved the rank of Lieutenant.

The son of Italian immigrants, Mr. Canzoneri was the first member of his family to attend college, having graduated from the United States Coast Guard Academy in 1956. After graduation, he participated in Operation Deep Freeze III on the USCGC *Westwind*, making three trips to the Arctic Circle and one trip to the Antarctic. Mr. Canzoneri then served on the USCGC *Absecon* out of Norfolk, Virginia and thereafter was the Executive Officer on the USCGC *Jonquil*. He visited five continents, with notable trips to Greenland, Norway, and Brazil. Mr. Canzoneri was honorably discharged in 1960.

Mr. Canzoneri graduated from St. John's University School of Law in 1966, working first at Hill, Lent & Troescher in Lynbrook, then as a partner at Shapiro, Gottshalk, Driscoll & Canzoneri in Franklin Square. In 1975, he established his own law firm as a sole practitioner with general practice until the formation of Canzoneri & Canzoneri, LLP, with his daughter, Patricia, in 2001.

For 19 years, Mr. Canzoneri served on the Malverne Village Board. During his years as a Trustee, he served as Fire Commissioner, Police Commissioner, and Commissioner of the Department of Public Works. He was also appointed Deputy Mayor from 1988 to 1991. In 1995, Mr. Canzoneri became the first Mayor of the Village of Malverne who was born in the Village. Before retiring in 1999, he presided over the Village's 75th anniversary and had a record of cutting and lowering taxes.

Mr. Canzoneri was a founding member of the Malverne Volunteer Ambulance Corps, established in 1968, and was a qualified Emergency Medical Technician and former legal advisor to the Corps. He has also been involved in numerous community organizations throughout his life, such as the Village of Malverne's 50th anniversary in 1971, the Rotary Club, and the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Council.

Happily married for over 60 years to his wife, Judith, Mr. Canzoneri is the proud father of six children and an even prouder grandfather of 13 grandchildren.



JOSEPH CANZONERI WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
**SENATOR PATRICIA M.
CANZONERI-FITZPATRICK**

2026



VETERANS

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DAVID CRUM

David Crum enlisted in the United States Coast Guard.

Originally from the coal country of Portage in Western Pennsylvania, Mr. Crum joined the Coast Guard in 1968. He went on to attend boot camp in Cape May, New Jersey before being assigned to the Coast Guard Cutter *Dallas* in September 1968 and USCGC *Spencer* in August 1969.

In June 1971, Mr. Crum was stationed at the USCG Reserve Training Center base St. George on Staten Island, New York. It was during this tour of duty that the British aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal*, in port in New York City for public visiting, broke her moorings at her berth in Pier 92 and had to be relocated to St. George. Mr. Crum spent the next several days preparing those piers for the unexpected arrival and berthing of landing facility barges and equipment, assisting in shuttling 80 British personnel on compassionate or emergency leave to local airports, setting up joint United States and British command posts, and the safe movement of the 2,500-man crew and 3,000 visitors during the week. For his actions, he was awarded a Commandant's Letter of Commendation.

Upon discharge, Mr. Crum started working for New York Life Insurance, where he was employed for 37 years until his retirement in 2010.

After retirement, Mr. Crum joined the Catholic War Veterans and Auxiliary of the USA, where he held numerous positions as Commander of Astoria Post 1, the founding post of the organization. He subsequently served as Commander of the CWV Queens Chapter and CWV Department of New York. He was elected as National Executive Director in 2013 and National Commander from 2019-2023. Mr. Crum is credited with bringing the Catholic War Veterans of the USA into the digital age by upgrading its administrative system to a web-based database system using skills he learned working in New York Life's IT Department. He has since returned to his role as the National Executive Director at the Catholic War Veterans of the USA.

Mr. Crum and his wife of 52 years, Marylyn, settled in Astoria, Queens. They are the proud parents of two children, Elizabeth and James, and have two grandchildren, Olivia and Charlotte.



DAVID CRUM WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR MICHAEL GIANARIS

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SANDY DAVIS

Sandy Davis enlisted in the United States Army Cavalry on March 18, 1968. He achieved the rank of Sergeant E-5.

Called into the draft while attending college, Mr. Davis answered the call to serve his country. During his military career, he completed basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, then continued training at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana and Fort Riley, Kansas. He served on active duty in both Vietnam and Germany until 1971.

Amid the challenges of wartime service, Mr. Davis stood out for his commitment to justice and dignity, advocating for equal treatment and civil rights for service members within the ranks. His leadership and courage in promoting fairness during a turbulent era left a lasting impact on his fellow soldiers and the units he served with.

After his honorable discharge, Mr. Davis transitioned to civilian life, where he worked diligently at the United States Postal Service and later in banking. In these roles, he combined dependability, attention to detail, and a strong work ethic, building trust with colleagues and customers alike.

Mr. Davis's steady presence and commitment to service extended beyond his professions into civic and fraternal life. He served as a Prince Hall Mason, engaging in community-oriented initiatives and brotherhood activities that reflected his values.

A devoted family man, he married Janet Davis, and together they raised a son, Gary Davis. Mr. Davis's family remained central to his life and a source of pride. For many years, he volunteered at Union Baptist Church, contributing to numerous programs and outreach efforts. Whether organizing events, supporting youth initiatives, or assisting congregational activities, his volunteerism exemplified a lifelong dedication to faith, fellowship, and service.

Rooted in Brooklyn origins, strengthened by military service, and sustained by community involvement, Mr. Davis's life reflects a persistent commitment to service, equality, and family. His contributions across military, professional, fraternal, and church spheres showcase a legacy defined by integrity, advocacy, and quiet leadership.

Mr. Davis, born in 1948, grew up as the son of Virginia-born parents alongside two older brothers. His early life in a close-knit family instilled a strong sense of responsibility, community, and respect for tradition.



SANDY DAVIS WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR KEVIN S. PARKER

2026



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JOHN DEPERNO

John DePerno is a United States Army veteran who proudly served as a Private First Class during World War II.

Mr. DePerno served in the 133rd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion from 1943 to 1946 in Northern France, the Rhineland in Germany, and Central Europe. A member of the "Greatest Generation," he was recognized for his service with the American Service Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal and World War II Victory Medal.

Upon returning from military service, Mr. DePerno graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Economics with the first class at Utica College of Syracuse University (now known as Utica University). He married his high school sweetheart, Mafalda, in 1947 and was blessed with four daughters, Marianne, Elaine, Dorthea and Joni. Through the years, they joyously watched their family expand with the addition of six grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Known affectionately as "Captain John," he is a legend in the local restaurant and hospitality industry. While driving a tractor trailer for Gold Medal Foods, Mr. DePerno and his wife ran several games on the Sylvan Beach midway on weekends. He also managed the Carlton Beach Club in West Palm Beach, Florida. From 1954-1982, Mr. DePerno owned and operated the famous Forest Hotel, a busy and trendy night club, and The Castle of Fun, a cool spot for kids on the midway in Sylvan Beach.

Mr. DePerno achieved his goal of creating a highly successful restaurant where his family could eat and work together when Captain John's Restaurant opened in 1973. Today, you will still see Mr. DePerno in front of Captain John's Restaurant donning his white captain hat, greeting passersby and opening the door for customers while regaling them with stories.

Active in his community, Mr. DePerno was a founding member of the committee to incorporate the Village of Sylvan Beach, the Oneida Lake East Shore Merchants Association, the We Care Village Booster Club and the Sylvan Beach Beautification Committee. He served on the Sylvan Beach Planning Board and was a Village Trustee. Mr. DePerno was the founder, creator and editor of We Care Village News, a monthly newsletter distributed to residents outlining ways to make their newly founded village stronger, along with a plethora of fun local news and events.

Mr. DePerno was born to Italian immigrants in Utica in 1924 and recently turned 102.



JOHN DEPERNO WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JOSEPH A. GRIFFO

2026



VETERANS

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ANTONIO DIAZ

Antonio Diaz proudly enlisted in the United States Army and served as an 11 Bravo Infantryman, achieving the rank of Specialist.

Born and raised in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, Mr. Diaz joined the Army at the age of 19, embarking on a decade-long military career marked by commitment, resilience, and a strong sense of duty.

Six months before Mr. Diaz's contract was to end, he was called upon once again to serve our Nation as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a Combat Lifesaver, he was tasked with assisting wounded soldiers. Mr. Diaz survived a hostile hot zone. He took fire with no visibility of the enemy, encountered IED roadside bombings while driving on the desert roads, and survived mortar and rocket attacks on base. Mr. Diaz bravely fought in the war in Iraq for 18 months and proudly served in the Army for approximately 10 years.

Despite losing friends during his time in the military, he endured the difficult journey of trying to survive during and after war.

Mr. Diaz continues to support and uplift his friends and fellow veterans in Sunset Park. When reminiscing on his war stories, he speaks fondly of the bravery of his fellow "grunts," those brave soldiers who were first in the line of fire. His family prefers to honor both him and them by calling them the Impenetrable Wall of the USA, for had he not been willing to put his own life on the line — and had many others not lost theirs — we would never have the freedoms we have today.

After his time in the Army, Mr. Diaz joined the New York City Department of Sanitation. He continues his dedication to public service in Brooklyn Community District 2.

Mr. Diaz is a volunteer with the Sunset Park Lions, alongside his friends and family. He continues to support his community through health care initiatives, youth development services, and essential resources, including food drives and various cultural celebrations that uplift New Yorkers of all ages.



ANTONIO DIAZ WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ANDREW S. GOUNARDES

2026



VETERANS

★ ★ ★ HALL OF FAME ★ ★ ★

LORI DISPENZA

Lori Dispenza served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant.

Ms. Dispenza is a distinguished veteran and steadfast advocate whose life and career reflect an enduring commitment to service, both in uniform and in her community. Originally from Portland, New York, she graduated from Brocton Central School and enlisted in the Army in 1998 as a 92Y Supply Sergeant, beginning a remarkable military career marked by a wide range of assignments.

Ms. Dispenza's assignments included Alaska, Fort Jackson in South Carolina, Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras with Joint Task Force-Bravo, recruiting duty in Southern California, and Fort Drum's 10th Mountain Division, followed by a 15-month deployment to Kirkuk, Iraq with A Company, 1st BSTB, 1st BCT. Over more than a decade in uniform, she rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant and earned numerous commendations, including four Army Commendation Medals, three Army Achievement Medals, three Army Good Conduct Medals, and the Iraq Campaign Medal with Service Star.

Following her honorable discharge in 2010, Ms. Dispenza continued her commitment to service through education and advocacy. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Criminal Justice from SUNY Fredonia in 2012, followed by an Advanced Certificate in Veterans Services from SUNY Empire State College in 2014. In 2012, she was honored to serve as a guest speaker at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Day event in Washington, D.C., reflecting the respect she had earned as a veteran and the significance of her service.

In 2014, Ms. Dispenza began working with the Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency, helping veterans and their families navigate the often complex process of securing benefits and support. In 2016, she joined the New York State Department of Veterans' Services, expanding her advocacy on behalf of veterans across the State.

Over the past 12 years, Ms. Dispenza has represented hundreds of veterans and filed thousands of claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2025, she returned to Dunkirk as a Veterans Service Officer with the Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency, bringing extensive expertise and a deeply personal dedication to the community she now calls home.

Ms. Dispenza's legacy is one of patriotism, compassion, and tireless devotion to others. She resides in Dunkirk and is the proud mother of her nine-year-old daughter, Willow, whose future is strengthened by her example of service and dedication.



LORI DISPENZA WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR GEORGE M. BORRELLO

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

CHRISTOPHER J. DOUGLAS

Christopher J. Douglas served in the United States Marine Corps and achieved the rank of Colonel.

He served for six years in the U.S. Army Reserve as a Combat Engineer with Company C, 854th Engineer Battalion.

In 1991, Mr. Douglas completed the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School, the Basic School, and the Infantry Officer Course. He was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, where he commanded three platoons, was an Executive Officer, and was the 3/6 Battalion Adjutant. During this tour, he participated in Operation Battle Griffin in Norway. He served as part of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Operations Continue Hope in Somalia, Provide Promise and Deny Flight in the Adriatic Sea, and Support Democracy in Haiti.

Mr. Douglas transitioned from active military service to the United States Marine Corps Reserve to pursue a career in law enforcement. He entered the New York State Police in January 1996 and served as a Trooper, Investigator, and Narcotics Investigator until he retired in 2020.

Following the attacks on America on September 11, 2001, Mr. Douglas returned to active duty to lead Marines on five combat tours in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, Inherent Resolve, Freedom's Sentinel, and Resolute Support Mission.

During the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Mr. Douglas served as the Assistant Chief of Staff G-5 at U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command, forward-deployed to Qatar to assist with processing evacuees from Afghanistan. He was also the senior Marine in the Pentagon's investigation into the August 2021 bombing outside the Kabul airport, killing 13 U.S. service members and approximately 170 Afghans. He subsequently retired from the Marine Corps in October 2022.

Mr. Douglas earned numerous awards, including two Legions of Merit (one with a Combat Distinguishing Device), two Bronze Star Medals, the Purple Heart, three Combat Action Ribbons, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, two Meritorious Service Medals, the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V," a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and the Humanitarian Service Medal.

Mr. Douglas currently serves as Deputy to the Commanding General and Highly Qualified Expert to the Office of the Secretary of War.

He and his wife, Susan, live in Milton. Their son, First Lieutenant John B. Douglas IV, now serves as an Infantry Officer in the United States Army.



CHRISTOPHER J. DOUGLAS WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JAMES N. TEDISCO

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MODESTO FIGUEROA

Modesto Figueroa was born on May 7, 1933, in Cidra, Puerto Rico, a small mountain town that shaped his character long before war would test it. As a young man, he worked as a salesclerk in Cayey from 1950 to 1952, earning a reputation for diligence, humility, and quiet determination. Those who knew him saw early on the strong work ethic and deep sense of responsibility that would define his life.

During the Korean War, Mr. Figueroa was drafted into the United States Army at Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico. After completing basic training, he was deployed to Korea in January 1952 and assigned to Company F, 65th Infantry Regiment — the legendary Borinqueneers.

In September 1952, Mr. Figueroa was sent directly to the front lines during the Battle of Outpost Kelly in the rugged hills northwest of Cheorwon. There, the regiment faced one of the darkest chapters in its history, suffering its highest casualties since the start of the war. The fighting was relentless.

In October, only weeks later, Mr. Figueroa endured the brutal Battle of Jackson Heights northwest of Cheorwon. Positioned at low ground and forced to climb steep, exposed hillsides, the Borinqueneers advanced under devastating enemy fire from well-fortified positions on higher terrain. The odds were overwhelming. Yet, through courage and sacrifice, they pressed forward, carrying not only their rifles, but the honor of Puerto Rico and the United States on their shoulders.

Mr. Figueroa achieved the rank of Corporal and was honorably discharged in 1954. He returned home to Puerto Rico, and in 1959, he moved to New York City in search of a new opportunity.

He began a 30-year career with the United States Postal Service in 1963, serving his community with the same dedication he had shown in uniform. He retired after three decades of faithful service.

A devoted husband, father, and longtime resident of Washington Heights since 1973, Mr. Figueroa built a life defined by resilience, integrity, and love of family. His example inspired one of his sons to serve in the military.

From the battlefields of Korea to the streets of New York, Mr. Figueroa's life stands as a testament to sacrifice, perseverance, and enduring honor.



MODESTO FIGUEROA WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ROBERT JACKSON

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOHN F. FOX

John F. Fox served in the United States Army and was a Military Policeman.

At the age of 19, Mr. Fox began a distinguished career in law enforcement while serving in Vietnam. As the United States concluded its military involvement during the final stages of the war and withdrew ground forces, the Military Police remained among the last major units to depart.

When America formally ended its combat operations in Vietnam, the remaining U.S. military presence had been reduced to approximately 1,000 personnel. On March 27, 1973, Mr. Fox was among the last American service members to leave the country.

A decorated veteran, Mr. Fox was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for Meritorious Service, a testament to his dedication, professionalism, and courage under challenging conditions. Notably, he stands among the youngest veterans to have served in and survived the Vietnam War.

Following his honorable discharge, Mr. Fox continued his lifelong commitment to public safety and justice. His extensive career includes service as a licensed Private Investigator, Police Officer, Criminal Investigator, and Federal Special Agent.

Now retired, Mr. Fox has achieved significant academic accomplishments, earning both a Master of Professional Studies and a Master of Science. His advanced graduate certificates span a range of disciplines, including Human Resource Management, Information Systems Management, Industrial Management, Educational Computing, and Paralegal Studies.

Mr. Fox's legacy is one of service, perseverance, and excellence—both in uniform and beyond — reflecting the very highest ideals of our Nation's veterans.



JOHN F. FOX WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR MARIO R. MATTERA

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

WILLIAM FRANK, JR.

William Frank, Jr. served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Captain.

Commissioned through ROTC at Niagara University as a Distinguished Military Graduate, Mr. Frank served as a Finance Officer in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. At just 24 years old, he was entrusted with managing millions of dollars in military funds in support of American service members during the Vietnam War.

Following his military service, Mr. Frank earned his CPA license and built a distinguished career with the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, ultimately rising to lead the Income/Franchise Field Audit Bureau. Throughout his more than three decades with the Department, he was known for his integrity and commitment to serving New Yorkers in his community and across the State.

In 2010, Mr. Frank began a second career as Director of Veterans Services for Schenectady County. In this role, he was a dedicated advocate for Capital Region veterans, ensuring they received the benefits, support, and respect they deserve. He implemented a series of programs to honor and champion veterans during his tenure, including the creation of Schenectady County's Honor-A-Veteran Program and overseeing the construction of the Schenectady County Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park at SUNY Schenectady. Mr. Frank was instrumental in delivering more than \$630 million from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for disability, education, and insurance benefits for Schenectady County veterans.

He is an outspoken advocate for improving and expanding access to mental health services. Mr. Frank has been instrumental in establishing and participating in peer-to-peer support programs designed to assist veterans navigating mental health crises and challenges. He has noted the importance of peer support, particularly for those who tend to self-isolate, for fostering dialogue, sharing resources, and empowering fellow service members to seek help and support.

In recognition of his selflessness, sacrifice, and his steadfast support and tireless advocacy for veterans across the Capital Region and beyond, Mr. Frank is being recognized for a lifetime of service to his fellow veterans, his community, and our Nation.



WILLIAM FRANK, JR. WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR PATRICIA A. FAHY

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

EUGENE GERRARD

Eugene Gerrard enlisted in the United States Coast Guard and achieved the rank of Quartermaster First Class.

Mr. Gerrard knew early on that he was called to serve. At just 17 years old in the summer of 1941, he set his sights on joining the military. Working as a printer by day and attending trade school at night in Brooklyn, Mr. Gerrard was ready to enlist. Inspired by his brother who was already serving and driven by a deep sense that “It was my time,” he joined the Coast Guard in 1942.

Mr. Gerrard served until 1945, earning the rank of Quartermaster First Class. His service was recognized with the American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory Medal, and Philippine Liberation Medal.

But for Mr. Gerrard, service did not end when he returned home. It defined the rest of his life.

He built and operated two successful printing businesses over more than 60 years, while continuing to answer a greater calling to serve his community and country. Motivated by what he described as “a concern for the country,” Mr. Gerrard stepped into public service and was a Brookhaven Town Councilman for more than two decades.

At the same time, Mr. Gerrard dedicated 50 years to the Mount Sinai Fire Department, serving as Chief, Chaplain, and Fire Police Captain. He also founded both the Department’s Benevolent Association and the Brookhaven Volunteer Firefighters Museum.

Even in his nineties, Mr. Gerrard continued giving back. At age 94, he began volunteering at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center as a Red Coat Ambassador, welcoming and assisting fellow veterans with compassion and care.

Mr. Gerrard’s love for this country has guided every chapter of his life. As he puts it, “America is the best place in the world to live. It’s the land of the free... there is just an emotional feeling about living in the best country on Earth.”



EUGENE GERRARD WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR PAMELA A. HELMING

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JAIME GONZALEZ

Jaime Gonzalez served in the United States Marine Corps and achieved the rank of Sergeant.

Mr. Gonzalez graduated from Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island in April 1985, completed Infantry Training School at Camp Lejeune, and earned Jungle Expert qualification at Fort Sherman, Panama. He was assigned to Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, and he attended Mountain Warfare Training School in California.

Mr. Gonzalez received the Selected Marine Corps Reserve Good Conduct Medal in January 1989. He activated for Operation Desert Shield in October 1990, joining the 2nd Light Armored Infantry, 2nd Marine Division, arriving in Saudi Arabia in November. He participated in combat during the Battle of Khafji in 1991 in Desert Storm, earning a Combat Action Ribbon. Mr. Gonzalez was honorably discharged from the Reserve on November 12, 1992.

Mr. Gonzalez earned numerous awards, including the Combat Action Ribbon, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Navy Unit Commendation, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait Liberation Medals, New York State Naval Militia: NYS Desert Storm Service Medal, NYS Good Conduct Ribbon, NYS Conspicuous Service Medal, NYS Medal of Merit, NYC Conspicuous Star Medal, Westchester County Certificate of Service, and Cold War Service recognitions.

Mr. Gonzalez joined the American Legion and Marine Corps League in 1991, serving over 34 years. At Beauvais-Hudson Post, he was Vice Commander and Commander for 30 years, chaired the School Award Program and Americanism Committee for over 30 years, and led Six and Seven Points programs for 25 years.

As an Eagle Scout, Mr. Gonzalez promotes Boys' State participation and supports the Tottenville High School JROTC with medals and certificates for cadets' community and drill service. At the county level, he has served in numerous positions, started a new award, and connects veterans with Aquehonga District Scouts. His many honors include Legionnaire of the Year, Joseph M. Ripley Award, Post Service and Merit Award, and the 2018 national Square Knot Award for Scouting contributions.

Mr. Gonzalez is well-known for supporting many community events. He believes community service is the lifeblood of the community.



JAIME GONZALEZ WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ANDREW J. LANZA

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

COLDEN GRANT

Coldden Grant is a Vietnam War veteran who honorably served in the United States Army with the 101st Airborne Division, 3rd Brigade from 1969 to 1970, during one of the most challenging periods in American military history.

Mr. Grant began his military service at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he successfully completed both basic and advanced training. Through this rigorous preparation, he developed the discipline, technical proficiency, physical endurance, and mental resilience required for assignment to an elite airborne combat unit. His training prepared him for the demanding responsibilities associated with airborne and infantry operations during wartime.

During his deployment to Vietnam, Mr. Grant served in a hostile and high-risk combat environment that required constant vigilance, adaptability, and unwavering commitment to mission objectives. His duties placed him in situations that demanded courage under fire, sound judgment under pressure, and a deep sense of responsibility toward his fellow soldiers. Throughout his service, he consistently demonstrated fortitude, professionalism, and an unyielding dedication to duty. Mr. Grant's conduct reflected the highest standards of accountability and honor expected of United States Army infantry soldiers engaged in active ground combat.

In recognition of his bravery and sacrifice, Mr. Grant was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds sustained in combat. He also received the Combat Infantryman Badge, one of the Army's most distinguished honors, awarded to infantry soldiers who actively engaged enemy forces in ground combat. His additional military decorations include the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal, recognizing his honorable service during a time of armed conflict. Mr. Grant also earned the Parachutist Badge and the Air Assault Badge, signifying successful completion of specialized airborne and air mobility training. Additionally, he qualified as a marksman, demonstrating weapons proficiency and adherence to rigorous military standards.

Mr. Grant was honorably discharged from the United States Army in 1973, concluding a period of service distinguished by integrity, discipline, and devotion to duty.

Mr. Grant's military service reflects a legacy of courage, resilience, and selfless dedication to country. His record stands as a lasting testament to the sacrifice and commitment of those who served during the Vietnam War era and exemplifies the values honored by the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame.



*COLDEN GRANT WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JAMES SANDERS JR.*

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

NATHAN B. GRANT

Nathan B. Grant served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Specialist (SPC) E4.

Born in Virginia and raised in rural North Carolina as the youngest of 12 children, Mr. Grant grew up during a time when military service was a looming reality for many young men. By the time he was a teenager, three of his brothers had already been drafted into the military. In 1965, Mr. Grant himself was drafted into the United States Army during the height of the Vietnam War. Although he initially had concerns about being sent to war, he developed a deep sense of pride in serving his country after completing basic training in South Carolina.

Mr. Grant later completed Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Riley, Kansas, where he endured demanding field exercises and harsh winter conditions. After several months of training with the Ninth Infantry Division, he and thousands of fellow soldiers were ordered to deploy overseas. Following a 23-day journey by ship from California, he arrived in Vietnam in late 1966. Mr. Grant was stationed at Camp Bearcat, where he began participating in combat missions in early 1967. During his service, he served in one of the most dangerous roles of the war as a tunnel rat, demonstrating courage and determination under extremely hazardous conditions.

Following his military service, Mr. Grant settled in the Hudson Valley and continued his lifelong commitment to service by supporting his fellow veterans. He is a Life Member of VFW Post 170 and a Life Member and Commander of American Legion Lafayette Post 37 in Poughkeepsie. Through these roles, he organizes holiday drives and food distributions, leads weekly "Burger Burn" fundraisers, maintains the Hero Garden memorial, and participates in Wreaths Across America programs in local schools.

Mr. Grant is a respected leader in the Hudson Valley veterans community who has positively impacted countless lives. Known throughout the region as "Nate the Great," he has dedicated himself to supporting his fellow veterans and strengthening community connections through service and mentorship.

Recognized as WPDH's "Vet Who Rocks," Mr. Grant was honored by Weekend's Warriors in 2025 for his ongoing dedication to veterans and the community.

Through decades of service both in uniform and in his community, Mr. Grant continues to exemplify the enduring spirit of dedication, leadership, and patriotism.



NATHAN B. GRANT WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ROBERT G. ROLISON

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

SUSAN HERSON, MD

Susan Herson, MD, is a United States Navy veteran, physician, and healthcare leader whose career has been defined by service to those who serve.

A board-certified internist, Dr. Herson began her medical career as a General Medical Officer with the 2nd Force Service Support Group at Camp Lejeune. She provided frontline care for more than 8,000 Marines and Sailors, oversaw immunization programs across multiple bases, and led performance improvement efforts in demanding operational environments.

After active duty, Dr. Herson continued to serve veterans as Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff at the Bath and Finger Lakes VA. She led more than 75 providers across primary care, geriatrics, and urgent care; chaired peer-review and credentialing committees; and deployed multiple times for disaster relief missions, including the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Later, she provided direct care as a PACT primary care provider at the Fort Wayne VA, expanding access through telehealth and covering colleagues during reserve deployments and family leave. Dr. Herson's work with older veterans and her own parents' aging journeys drew her into fall prevention and mobility safety.

Service is a family legacy. Dr. Herson and her late father share a rare bond as both Navy veterans and physicians. Her father, a high school dropout who became a doctor through the GI Bill, modeled how military opportunity and discipline can transform a life and a community. Her mother, Sallie Herson, carried that spirit into a career as an educator and advocate for New York City students. Together, they shaped Dr. Herson's commitment to using her skills wherever the need is greatest.

As Founder of remMD, Dr. Herson has applied the same clinical rigor and mission focus that guided her Navy and VA service to developing practical tools that help older adults remain safer and more independent at home and in care facilities.

Whether treating Marines in the field, leading teams at the VA, volunteering in global health settings, or building community through senior fitness classes, Dr. Herson's commitment is the same: to honor her fellow veterans and elders with care, dignity, and concrete solutions that reduce preventable harm.



SUSAN HERSON, MD, WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR LEA WEBB

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOSEPH HUNT

Joseph Hunt began his military service in February 1966 as an enlisted soldier in the United States Army. At 18 years old, he was stationed in Heidelberg, Germany at the Headquarters of the 7th Army Europe. He was selected for Armor Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1967.

Following his commissioning, Mr. Hunt was assigned to the Ordnance Officer Candidate School at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland, where he served as a TAC Officer responsible for the training, mentorship, and evaluation of officer candidates.

In 1968, Mr. Hunt was selected for training at the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where officers and specialized personnel were prepared in cultural competency, language, and counterinsurgency operations in support of the Vietnam War. He was subsequently assigned as an Infantry Advisor on a seven-man Military Assistance Command Vietnam team, working directly with Vietnamese Regional Forces in the Mekong Delta.

During his service in Vietnam, Mr. Hunt was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Honor Medal (First Class), and campaign ribbons recognizing his service. After a year of deployment, he returned to the United States and continued his education, pursuing his college degree.

After graduating, Mr. Hunt built a distinguished career spanning more than 30 years in marketing, advertising, and strategic communications, serving as a principal in two successful agencies that worked with major national organizations.

Committed to continued service, Mr. Hunt transitioned his leadership and communications expertise to the veteran community. He has held key roles, including Director of the Veterans Mental Health Coalition of New York City, Director of the New York Outdoor Rx Coalition, Senior Advisor at the Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans Education (PROVE), Co-Coordinator and mentor in the Westchester Veterans Treatment Court, and Veterans Outreach Specialist for Guardian Revival. Through this work, he has been instrumental in advancing initiatives that improve access to resources, strengthen community connection, and promote the well-being of service members, veterans, and their families.

Mr. Hunt remains actively engaged in supporting the military-connected community through advisory work, coalition building, and advocacy efforts focused on improving quality of life and expanding access to meaningful programs and services. He is grateful for the opportunity to serve, both in and out of uniform.



JOSEPH HUNT WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR SHELLEY B. MAYER

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

WILLIE JACKSON

Willie Jackson served in the United States Army as a Private First Class.

Mr. Jackson has spent much of his life serving others: his country, his fellow veterans, and the young people of Catskill. He has always shown up, quietly and without fanfare, to help his community. Throughout an exemplary life well-lived, Mr. Jackson has done everything he can to make his hometown a better place.

He graduated from Catskill High School in 1958, and soon afterwards, Mr. Jackson enlisted in the United States Army, serving during the Vietnam Era from 1960 to 1962. As a member of the 4th Infantry Division, he proudly served as a Communications Specialist.

Mr. Jackson was stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington and was later deployed to the highly strategic Fulda Gap region of Germany during the height of the Cold War. He was honorably discharged as a Private First Class. In recognition of his distinguished military record, Mr. Jackson received the Army Good Conduct Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and the Overseas Service Ribbon.

After completing his service, Mr. Jackson returned home and spent his professional career at the Ravena Cement Plant. In the community, his civic contributions were second to none. Over the years, he has been particularly dedicated to serving veterans and their families, becoming a lifetime member of Sullivan-Teator VFW Post 770. The VFW offers a multitude of programs and services to both veterans and the larger community, advocates for those who have served our country, and promotes a sense of patriotism. These timeless values have defined Mr. Jackson's life, and in 2025, he was recognized as Greene County Veteran of the Year.

Mr. Jackson has been a huge influence on the young people of Catskill, guiding them and helping them develop purpose and character, particularly through team sports. As Manager of the Catskill Boys Club, Mr. Jackson served as Sports Program Manager and youth mentor. He was also a beloved coach and umpire for the Catskill Little League. In honor of his many years of service, the local baseball field was renamed Jackson Mack Brantley Field.

Small towns across America are strengthened by the actions of exceptional citizens like Willie "Mack" Jackson, who commit themselves to lifting up their neighbors and working toward the common good. The people of Catskill are fortunate to count him as one of their own.



WILLIE JACKSON WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR MICHELLE HINCHEY

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

LOU JEROME

Lou Jerome served in the United States Navy. He achieved the rank of Private First Class and served as an Aviation Mechanist during World War II.

Mr. Jerome decided to sign up for the Navy at the age of 16, which required his mother's consent to enlist in the military, given he was too young to serve.

He had two brothers, Morris and Jerry, who both served in the Navy as well.

Mr. Jerome was mainly stationed in the United States of America, primarily in Oklahoma and California, although there is indication that he served on the USS *Monterrey*. A fire in St. Louis consumed many of the Navy documents.

After the war, Mr. Jerome was honorably discharged in 1946.

Thereafter, he married his wife, Ruth, and they had three children, Abe, Joey, and Esther. He opened his own small business and named it Lou's Deli.

Lou's Deli became a staple for the budding Jewish Syrian Sephardic community from the 1950s until his retirement in 2003. Today, the corner of East 2nd Street and Kings Highway, near the site of the deli, is named Lou's Deli Way, signifying his work and substantial impact on the community's development.

Mr. Jerome dedicated himself to community causes, directing much of his efforts toward assisting in the building of the Sephardic Community Center. Later, he was inducted into the Sephardic Center's Sports Hall of Fame.

Mr. Jerome's passion was always his family, especially his grandchildren, whom he cherished until his passing in 2022.



LOU JEROME WAS SELECTED POSTHUMOUSLY AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR SAM SUTTON

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOHN HARRY KELLERS

John Harry Kellers enlisted in the United States Navy at the age of 17 in June 1943.

A highly decorated World War II veteran, Mr. Kellers performed with great valor on June 6, 1944, the D-Day invasion of Normandy, one of the most ambitious and consequential military campaigns in world history.

Shipping out of Portsmouth, England in the early morning hours, he and his comrades could not have prepared for what they were about to experience. Mr. Kellers was a portside gunner's mate on landing craft LCT 539, which carried infantry and combat engineering equipment onto Omaha Beach. His job was to provide cover for the 16th Infantry, 1st Division soldiers during the hours of invasion.

Mr. Kellers's boat was hit by enemy fire and soldiers were blown up all around him, some before they ever left the craft. By the time the mission was complete and the fighting ended, 156,000 Allied troops had joined the battle. On Mr. Kellers's small section of beach alone, more than 2,000 American soldiers and sailors lost their lives. His job then became to help load the injured and the dead for transport back to England. After the initial landing on D-Day, Mr. Kellers's landing craft continued to ferry supplies ashore for months.

In 2009, Mr. Kellers and other surviving D-Day veterans were invited to France by the French government to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Mr. Kellers and his fellow veterans received the French Medal of Honor and the Chevalier Legion of Honor from then French President Nicolas Sarkozy. In 2024, Mr. Kellers was also inducted into the Patchogue-Medford Hall of Fame.

Once home from the war, Mr. Kellers married and started a family with his wife, Barbara, in Patchogue, raising their three children, Matt, Valerie, and Karen. He worked as a technician for the Long Island Lighting Company before taking on an administrative role at the Shoreham Nuclear Power Station. He retired in 1976.

On June 29, 2025, Mr. Kellers celebrated his 100th birthday with a parade of motorcycles, classic cars, vintage military vehicles, elected officials, family, and friends. Sadly, Mr. Kellers recently passed away on December 8, 2025, just prior to his induction into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame.

Mr. Kellers represented the best of this country. His contributions, both in and out of uniform, deserve our eternal respect and admiration.



*JOHN HARRY KELLERS WAS SELECTED POSTHUMOUSLY
AS A 2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY*
SENATOR DEAN MURRAY

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JASON D. KNAPP

Jason D. Knapp served in the United States Air Force and the Air Force Reserve, and he achieved the rank of Chief Master Sergeant.

Mr. Knapp entered basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas in June 1996 and then graduated from the Naval Explosive Ordnance Disposal School, Indian Head, Maryland in April 1997. He held a variety of EOD positions in both the continental United States and overseas while serving in three major commands before transitioning to the Air Force Reserve.

Mr. Knapp had a rich active duty and Reserve deployment history that included both traditional Air Force roles and joint service operations within Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, serving three tours in combat operations. He completed numerous Secret Service missions around the world, providing protection to U.S. presidents, vice presidents, and their families, as well as numerous foreign heads of state. Prior to assuming his final position, Mr. Knapp served as the Superintendent, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Flight, 433rd Airlift Wing, Joint Base stationed at San Antonio-Lackland, Texas.

Mr. Knapp's last assignment as the Flight Chief of the 914th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Flight, Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, culminated with his retirement on October 1, 2018. In this position, he led 16 experienced EOD operators and advised the squadron commander on all enlisted matters. His duties also included promoting enlisted career development, unit and mission readiness, training, and the squadron's health, morale, and welfare. Mr. Knapp also represented the Civil Engineer Squadron as an active member of the Wing's Top 3 and Chiefs group. He was responsible for providing full-time routine support and emergency EOD response coverage for over 16,821 square miles, canvassing 16 counties of western New York and northwest Pennsylvania. Mr. Knapp ensured the safety and security of over 2.8 million residents, 94 base facilities, and over 1,700 personnel within the 914th Wing, while also supporting six mission partners with 2,000 additional personnel.

For his bravery and service to our Nation, Mr. Knapp earned numerous awards and recognitions, including the Bronze Star with Valor Device and three Oak Leaf Clusters, Meritorious Service Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Combat Action Medal, Navy Combat Action Ribbon, and the Army Combat Action Badge.



JASON D. KNAPP WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR PETER OBERACKER

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

EUGENE LOPARCO

Eugene Loparco served in the United States Air Force, valiantly fighting in the Vietnam War from 1966 to 1969. He achieved the rank of Airman First Class.

During his service, Mr. Loparco survived the Tet Offensive campaign and distinguished himself as an Administrative Specialist, a role in which he constructed and maintained a complete administrative file in support of the Base Traffic Management Office. He was assigned to the "Tiger Flight" security team, guarding the base and perimeter.

For his military service, Mr. Loparco was presented with numerous awards, including the Air Force Good Conduct Medal and Ribbon, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award and Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal and Ribbon, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Service Medal and Ribbon. He also received the New York State Vietnam War Commemorative Medal and the Medal of Merit and Ribbon.

Outside of his military career, Mr. Loparco has worked as a Benefit Examiner for both the New York State Teachers' Retirement System and the Office of the State Comptroller Employees' Retirement System. He was the owner of The Loparco Studio and Weddings by Gene, which had three locations in Albany, Cohoes, and Watervliet, and he remains a well-known photographer throughout the Capital Region.

A dedicated community member and volunteer, Mr. Loparco donates his time and talents to multiple organizations, veteran- and non-veteran-related, throughout the Capital District. These include the Please Remember Me Foundation, Capital Region Veterans Memorial, AMVETS, Albany Knights of Columbus, American Italian Heritage Museum, Joseph E. Zaloga American Legion Post 1520, VFW Robert L. Weininger Post 8692, and Watervliet-Colonie Elks #1500.

Mr. Loparco was born on August 3, 1944, at St. Mary's Hospital in Troy, New York as the first of Vincent and Mary Loparco's five children. Growing up, he attended Our Lady of Mount Carmel Pre-School and Elementary, Catholic Central High School in Troy, West Genesee High School, and finally, Albany Business College.

He has enjoyed a long-standing marriage with his beloved wife, Linda, and they have two children, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Mr. Loparco has enriched the lives of those around him through his joyous and sincere love for others, and through the quiescent charm and wisdom which only comes from a fullness of years.



*EUGENE LOPARCO WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JACOB C. ASHBY*

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

FRANK MARCINEK

Frank Marcinek enlisted in the United States Air Force and achieved the rank of Sergeant. He served from September 1972 until 1976.

Mr. Marcinek joined the Air Force at a pivotal time in his young family's life. He was married and had one son with another on the way.

During the Vietnam Era, Mr. Marcinek completed 47 weeks of intensive training at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi, becoming an Air Traffic Control Radar Repairman. He was assigned to the Air Force Communications Squadron at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana and was tasked with maintaining radar systems supporting the 8th Air Force and 2nd Bomb Wing.

After four years of active duty, Mr. Marcinek returned to Long Island and began a 41-year career with Con Edison. Starting as a helper at the East River Power Plant in Manhattan, he advanced to Control Operator-A and later joined System Operations, serving in multiple critical grid management roles. Mr. Marcinek also developed computer systems, contributed to the replacement of the Energy Management System, and helped design three electric grid control rooms.

Despite demanding rotating shifts, Mr. Marcinek remained deeply committed to his community. He coached youth sports, supported Girl Scouts, and earned a Bachelor of Science in Leadership and Management from Manhattan College, graduating *magna cum laude* in 2002.

A dedicated member of the American Legion since 2011, Mr. Marcinek served as Post Commander during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and again in 2023, leading repairs, stabilizing finances, and guiding reopening efforts. He has also served as an EMT with the Levittown Fire Department and organized numerous programs honoring veterans, first responders, and local heroes.

Mr. Marcinek's leadership extends to the Levittown Lions Club, Hicksville Elks Lodge, AMVETS, and regional veterans' organizations. He leads ongoing food drives, supports veterans at the Northport VA Medical Center, organizes Narcan trainings, and advocates for struggling veterans service organizations.

Mr. Marcinek's tireless volunteerism — spanning food security, youth mentorship, veteran advocacy, and community restoration — reflects a lifelong commitment to service, leadership, and compassion.



FRANK MARCINEK WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR STEVEN RHODS

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JEZEBEL MCINTOSH

Jezebel McIntosh enlisted in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Sergeant E-5.

Ms. McIntosh served in the Army from 1999-2005. She earned numerous honors and recognitions, including the Army Achievements Medal (3rd Award), National Defense Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the Overseas Service Ribbon. In addition, Ms. McIntosh earned the NBC Defense Course, NBC Office Course, Combat Life Service Course and Field Sanitation Team Certificates.

Born in Harlem Hospital in New York in 1965, Ms. McIntosh is one of seven siblings. She is a graduate of Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn. In 1987, she relocated to Syracuse and attended OCM BOCES. Later, she continued her education and obtained an associate degree from Onondaga Community College, making the Provost's List for being an outstanding student.

While exploring a career with the Workers' Compensation Board, Ms. McIntosh decided she wanted to serve her country. At age 33, she enlisted in the Army.

Ms. McIntosh was medically discharged on March 17, 2005, and in 2021, she retired from the Army.

Although Ms. McIntosh never married or had children of her own, she has been an essential resource for others in her community. For the last seven months, she has been taking care of a spiritual family member who has been suffering from severe dementia, moving him into her home to provide the necessary care.

Ms. McIntosh draws strength from helping others and is dedicated to supporting her community. She is guided by her personal experiences and the mentorship she has received from her peers.

An active member of her Syracuse community for over 33 years, she has made a meaningful impact in the lives of others. Her work is rooted in compassion, integrity, and a deep belief in the power of showing up.



JEZEBEL MCINTOSH WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR RACHEL MAY

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RONNIE MCNAIR

Ronnie McNair enlisted in the United States Marine Corps from 1977 to 1989 and served with the Recon Rangers.

Mr. McNair attended high school in North Carolina and then relocated to the Bronx, where he graduated from Automotive High School in Brooklyn. Shortly thereafter, he joined the Marine Corps.

Mr. McNair entered service with the goal of pursuing culinary arts, but instead was redirected and stationed in Parris Island, South Carolina for combat preparation. He traveled and served abroad in Okinawa, Japan for two years.

Stationed in Beirut, Mr. McNair endured a near-death experience because of an explosion that took the lives of 225 other Marines. Due to this action, he was subjected to multiple surgeries on over 80% of his body and had to receive titanium replacements in some parts of his body. He was also in the burn unit to help heal and repair 50% of his body.

After an arduous recovery period, Mr. McNair returned to Upstate New York for additional surgery on his skull to have a plate replacement installed. He received physical therapy and mental health treatment to ensure his stability and coping mechanism modality level. He transitioned from being bedbound for almost two years to a wheelchair, then to a walker. Now, through extensive physical therapy and sheer determination, he is able to walk independently. Mr. McNair still actively receives ambulatory therapy and mental health treatment.

Mr. McNair participates in the Veterans Association and Wounded Warriors. He is an active member of the Penn Wortman Older Adult Center.

Born in Ranford, North Carolina in 1960, Mr. McNair is the youngest of six siblings and the only son of Mae Doris and James Walter McNair.

Mr. McNair is married with three adult children and has one grandchild.



RONNIE MCNAIR WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ROXANNE J. PERSAUD

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

KEVIN C. MEGGETT

Kevin C. Meggett enlisted in the United States Navy and achieved the rank of Fireman E-3.

His service to our Nation began on August 3, 1990, just one day after Iraq invaded Kuwait. He was called to enlist in the Navy, serving two years on active duty and six years in the Reserve.

During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Mr. Meggett earned numerous commendations, citations, and awards for his bravery responding to a pre-dawn Class Bravo fire that nearly consumed the naval ship he was on. Acting quickly, he helped save both the vessel and the lives of 375 crewmembers.

After receiving an honorable discharge, Mr. Meggett found himself faced with an entirely new kind of battle at home. The 2009 economic downturn left him unemployed after having worked in positions at the United Nations Federal Credit Union and New York City Off-Track Betting.

As a single father of three, Mr. Meggett was on the brink of homelessness when he discovered the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). Through its support, he was able to secure housing, regain stability, and find a renewed sense of purpose.

Determined to pay that support forward, Mr. Meggett joined HVRP as a staff member and spent the next 13 years serving veterans, eventually becoming the program's Director. This journey taught him two crucial lessons: no two veterans share the same challenges, and to truly help, we must meet veterans where they are and lift them from there.

After more than a decade working with HVRP, he came to the realization that veterans' issues were evolving faster than what the traditional services offered could keep up with. To meet that need, Mr. Meggett founded Veteran Action Now, an organization focused on direct support and policy advocacy.

His work has taken him to Washington, D.C., where he met with key leaders, including House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, whom he joined as a Veteran VIP at the 2024 State of the Union.

In 2025, a press conference was organized urging the administration to protect VA healthcare, and on July 4, Mr. Meggett led the End Veteran Poverty Now campaign at the Bronx Supreme Court.

Mr. Meggett continues advocating for expanded State funding to support New York's veterans and create programs strong enough to inspire national change.



KEVIN C. MEGGETT WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JAMAAL T. BAILEY

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MICHAEL R. MILITELLO

Michael R. Militello proudly served in the United States Army during the Vietnam War and achieved the rank of Specialist.

Mr. Militello demonstrated exceptional courage, resilience, and dedication to his fellow soldiers. Drafted in 1968 while attending the University at Buffalo, he served as an infantryman with the 25th Infantry Division. On August 13, 1968, while acting as point man for his unit, Mr. Militello was critically wounded during a Viet Cong ambush. Despite sustaining multiple gunshot wounds, he continued to return fire and assist his platoon until he was evacuated.

For his bravery and sacrifice, Mr. Militello was awarded the Purple Heart, the Combat Infantryman Badge, and numerous commendations recognizing his service in active ground combat.

Following months of recovery in military hospitals in Vietnam, Japan, and the United States, Mr. Militello returned home to Buffalo and resumed his education.

Drawing upon the discipline, perseverance, and leadership he developed in the Army, Mr. Militello built a highly successful career as an entrepreneur in Western New York's hospitality industry. Over the course of several decades, he founded and operated a number of well-known restaurants and entertainment venues, contributing to the growth and revitalization of Buffalo's dining and cultural landscape, particularly within the Theater District.

Mr. Militello has also demonstrated a deep and ongoing commitment to community service. He has held leadership roles in numerous civic and charitable organizations, including the Seneca Diabetes Foundation, the Amherst Drug Court Foundation, and the Market Arcade Film and Arts Centre.

Mr. Militello's contributions have supported economic development, public health initiatives, and the arts throughout the region. He has also been an advocate for veterans, helping to ensure that those who served have access to resources, opportunities, and recognition.

A lifelong resident of Western New York, Mr. Militello exemplifies the enduring values of service, leadership, and perseverance. His military heroism and lifelong commitment to his community have made a lasting impact, and his story continues to inspire future generations.



MICHAEL R. MILITELLO WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JEREMY J. ZELLNER

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

GEORGE M. MORREALE

George M. Morreale is a decorated combat veteran of World War II who served as a Sergeant in the United States Army.

In December 1943, Mr. Morreale registered with the local draft board. Three months later, he was notified that he was being called into service before he could finish high school.

In November 1944, he stepped off a ship in Scotland, and shortly after, he made his way across the English Channel to France. On December 7, his 19th birthday, Mr. Morreale and members of his unit began battling Germans.

In a Buffalo News article discussing his time overseas, he recalls: "I was young and scared stiff. I didn't realize what I was doing. It was kill or be killed. We had to commit ourselves to battle and that was it."

As part of the 87th Infantry Division, 3rd Army, Mr. Morreale soon went on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge, where he found himself positioned in a two-man foxhole for seven days and seven nights. He had to lie still during the day, or German tanks would open fire wherever they spotted movement. Food came in the form of K-rations after nightfall by men who crawled through the battlefield from foxhole to foxhole. To hydrate, water came from eating snow, which was plentiful during what was one of the coldest, harshest winters on record at the time.

Relief came on a sunny December 23 with the thunderous sound of American fighter planes taking out German tanks and forcing a retreat. When Mr. Morreale was finally able to get up, he realized his feet had been badly frostbitten. He had to be taken off the battlefield and was sent to a hospital in Paris, where he was later told he'd be heading home.

Shortly after arriving home, the war came to an end, and Mr. Morreale went back to finish high school at Trott Vocational School, where he focused on becoming a draftsman.

Mr. Morreale is a lifelong resident of Niagara Falls. He was employed as the City's Civil Engineer, then became Director of Public Works.

He married the former Margaret Suhansky, with whom he shares three children and seven grandchildren. In 2025, Mr. Morreale celebrated his 100th birthday.



GEORGE M. MORREALE WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ROBERT G. ORTT

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOHN A. NEGGIA

John A. Neggia enlisted in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Private First Class, serving as a Rifleman during World War II.

Mr. Neggia was 18 when he joined the Army on April 5, 1944. He served in the Army's 76th Infantry Division, Company 1, 304th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion in the European Theater of Operations, fighting in the Ardennes, Central Europe, and the Rhineland.

Courageously, Mr. Neggia served as a point man under General George S. Patton's Third Army, pushing east toward Germany and fighting in Osweiler and Dickweiler, Luxembourg.

For his unwavering service to his Nation, Mr. Neggia was awarded the Defense Distinguished Service Bronze Star, European Theater of Operations with Three Battle Stars, Combat Infantry Badge, World War II Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Honorable Service Lapel Patch (The Ruptured Duck), and the New York State Conspicuous Service Medal.

Upon being honorably discharged on May 22, 1946, Mr. Neggia returned to his hometown of Witherbee, New York. He went on to lead a life defined by service, dedication, and community involvement. Remaining a lifelong resident, he has earned the respect and trust of generations of neighbors through his unwavering work ethic, integrity, and willingness to help others. Whether assisting those in need or through mentoring others with his trade knowledge, Mr. Neggia consistently exemplifies the values instilled during his military service.

Since 1948, Mr. Neggia has been a member of VFW Post 5802, serving on the Board of Trustees and as Chaplain. He has also served in the Mineville-Witherbee Volunteer Fire Department since 1957. Until its disbandment in 2007, Mr. Neggia was on the Board of Directors for the 304th Infantry Regiment Association.

Mr. Neggia continues to speak at schools and libraries and give interviews regarding his time serving in the Army, along with his knowledge of local history. His lifelong dedication to helping others, strengthening his community, and leading by example has left a lasting impact on those who know him and beyond.



JOHN A. NEGGIA WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR DANIEL G. STEC

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

PAUL OLEKSIW

Paul Oleksiw served in the United States Navy and the United States Naval Reserve, achieving the rank of Petty Officer Third Class.

Mr. Oleksiw, a lifelong resident of Port Washington, New York, enlisted in the Navy in 1984 at the age of 17. He attended basic training at Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Illinois in 1985 and subsequently completed Gunners Mate "A" School, where he earned his Gunners Mate guns rating.

Upon completion of his training, Mr. Oleksiw was assigned to the submarine tender USS *L.Y. Spear* (AS-36), home-ported in Norfolk, Virginia, and attached to Submarine Squadron 6, serving in the ship's Armory Division of the Weapons Department.

In 1988, Mr. Oleksiw participated in Operation Teamwork 88, a major NATO exercise conducted in the Norwegian Sea during the height of the Cold War. The multinational operation evaluated NATO's ability to conduct coordinated maritime defense operations along Norway's coastline. Mr. Oleksiw was honorably discharged from active duty in 1989 with the rank of Petty Officer Third Class, and he continued his service in the United States Naval Reserve until receiving his honorable discharge on November 16, 1992.

Following his military service, Mr. Oleksiw attended the College of Aeronautics, graduating in 1993 with a Bachelor of Technology in Aeronautical Maintenance. In 1995, he became a business partner at Bill's Auto Repair, a Port Washington business established in 1977, where he has proudly served the community for more than three decades.

Mr. Oleksiw has maintained a distinguished record of public and community service. He is currently serving his 15th year as an elected Commissioner for the Port Washington Garbage District. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Greater Port Washington Business Improvement District for more than 21 years, including as President and Secretary. Mr. Oleksiw also serves as a Board Member and current Secretary of the John Philip Sousa Memorial Bandshell Committee, and he previously served as Director and Secretary of the Willowdale/Terrace Civic Association.

Mr. Oleksiw is a proud member and current Vice Commander of American Legion Post 509, where he remains dedicated to supporting veterans and promoting community service.

He met his wife, Jeanine, in 1992, and they married in 1997. They have raised two children, Tyler and Heather, in Port Washington, both of whom have pursued careers in nursing.



PAUL OLEKSIW WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JACK M. MARTINS

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

DENIS E. OLIVER

Denis E. Oliver served in the United States Air Force and achieved the rank of Senior Airman.

He enlisted after graduating from high school in 1981, embarking on a journey that led him to Steuben County, New York, where he has devoted his life's work to assistance and service to veterans and their families locally, statewide, and throughout our Nation.

From 1981 to 1985, Mr. Oliver served as an Aircraft Armaments System Specialist, stationed at bases in Hahn (Germany) and Loring (Maine). He earned numerous military awards, including the Air Force Achievement Medal, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, and the Eighth Air Force Award for Excellence.

Following his honorable discharge, Mr. Oliver settled in Steuben County, where he discovered his calling in 2004 upon joining the Steuben County Veterans' Service Agency as a Service Officer. He became widely known for his unwavering commitment to going the extra mile while counseling and assisting area veterans and their families. As a valued mentor, he was there to help them navigate State and federal programs and services in education, employment, financial aid, health care, housing, job training, and vocational rehabilitation and outreach, among others.

From 2019 until his retirement in 2024, Mr. Oliver worked as a New York State Department of Veterans' Services Advisor, assisting, advising, and advocating for veterans' rights and benefits.

He is a past President of the County Veterans Service Officers Association of New York State, and he received the Theodore S. Coleman Memorial Service Officer of the Year award from the American Legion Department of New York in 2011.

Mr. Oliver has been a mainstay of the American Legion, holding numerous leadership posts, including Chairman of both the District and County Veteran Services Committees and District Vice Director of the New York State American Legion Riders.

He has also been active in the New York State Elks Association as a State Vice President and Co-Chair of the National Veterans Service Committee, amassing over 1,500 hours of volunteer time for the Bath VA Museum and VAMC services.

Mr. Oliver serves on the Wreaths Across America Planning Committee for Bath National Cemetery.

With his wife, Sue, Mr. Oliver has two stepchildren, Kristin and Nick, and five grandchildren.



DENIS E. OLIVER WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR THOMAS F. O'MARA

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JUSTIN YOUNG PARK

Justin Young Park served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Specialist.

A graduate from the State University of New York at Herkimer in 2009, Mr. Park earned an Associate degree in Criminal Justice, laying the groundwork for a life defined by service and discipline. Driven by a commitment to serve his country, he enlisted in the Army as an Infantryman in early 2010. He completed rigorous One Station Unit Training and Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia in 2011, earning his Parachutist Badge and demonstrating exceptional physical and tactical proficiency.

Following training, Mr. Park was assigned to the storied 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, where he served as a rifleman in the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1-504 Parachute Infantry Regiment, Charlie Company, 3rd Platoon, known as the “Red Devils.” There, he completed advanced combat preparations, including Joint Readiness Training and Mountain Phase Training, sharpening his skills for deployment in high-risk environments.

In March 2012, Mr. Park deployed to Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan before moving to Combat Outpost Moqur in Ghazni province. During his deployment, he was promoted to Specialist and took on multiple critical roles, including rifleman, grenadier, SAW gunner, and machine gunner. He participated in more than 35 mobile convoys and 12 firefights, demonstrating courage and adaptability under pressure. Mr. Park survived two improvised explosive device attacks. During one incident, he sustained a traumatic brain injury and received treatment at Combat Outpost Moqur before returning to duty.

Mr. Park’s outstanding service, sacrifice, and courage have been recognized by the United States with numerous awards. His decorations reflect both valor and dedication, including the Purple Heart, the U.S. Army Commendation Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the NATO Medal, the Combat Infantryman Badge, and the Parachutist Badge.

After completing his deployment, Mr. Park returned to Fort Bragg, where he continued medical treatment while fulfilling the remainder of his service commitment. In early 2015, Mr. Park was honorably discharged and transitioned to the Individual Ready Reserve, concluding a distinguished period of active-duty service.



JUSTIN YOUNG PARK WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JOHN C. LIU

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JUAN PARRA

Juan Parra began his distinguished military career in 1987 when he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve. As a young service member, he quickly demonstrated keen leadership skills and an unwavering commitment to duty.

During his time in the Marine Corps Reserve, he was activated for several major campaigns, including Operation Desert Storm, answering the call to serve during a critical moment in our Nation's history.

In 1993, Mr. Parra transitioned to the United States Army National Guard, where his dedication and professionalism earned him a commission as an Officer. Four years later, in 1997, he embarked on a new chapter as an Investigator for the United States Air Force. In this role, he contributed to our national security efforts at home and abroad.

In 2002, following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, Mr. Parra was called to active duty and remained until 2005. During his Air Force career, he participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and other key missions in the global fight against terrorism.

In 2009, Mr. Parra was assigned to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, where he played a critical role in investigating and preventing acts of terrorism. His work required not only investigative expertise, but also steady leadership and sound judgment under pressure.

In 2017, after 32 years of honorable military service, Mr. Parra retired with the rank of Major in the United States Air Force. He continued his commitment to public safety and national security in civilian service, ultimately retiring in 2022 from the Department of Homeland Security as a Criminal Investigator.

Beyond his decorated military and federal career, Mr. Parra has been a steadfast advocate for veterans, dedicating his time and energy to ensuring that those who have served receive the support, recognition, and resources they deserve.

As a proud Bronx resident, he remains deeply rooted in his community. Today, Mr. Parra serves as the 2nd Vice-Chairperson for Bronx Community Board Five and as the Board's Chairperson of the Veterans Committee, where he continues to champion the needs of veterans.



JUAN PARRA WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR GUSTAVO RIVERA

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MARTIN PEDRAZA

Martin Pedraza served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Specialist (PS4).

During the Vietnam War, Mr. Pedraza served in a chemical, biological, and radiological warfare unit. He traveled across the United States and abroad, including assignments in Alabama, Virginia, Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, and Vietnam.

Following his military service, Mr. Pedraza pursued training in optics and built a long and stable career at Eastman Kodak Company, where he worked for over 25 years. During that time, he raised three children in the same neighborhood that shaped him, instilling in them the same values of community and care.

Born in Puerto Rico and raised in Rochester from a young age, Mr. Pedraza's life has been deeply rooted in the neighborhood he continues to serve today. His early experiences at the Lewis Street Center, now the YMCA Center for Equity at Lewis Street, provided a foundation of support and belonging that later inspired his own commitment to giving back.

For more than five decades, Mr. Pedraza has been a steady and trusted presence in Rochester, known for his humility, independence, and unwavering dedication to his neighbors. His work spans civic engagement, youth mentorship, and grassroots organizing. He has been actively involved with the Interloop Community Project, serves as a Marketview Heights Ambassador, and contributes to youth education initiatives through programs like the Lewis Street Center's "Fairy GodParents."

One of Mr. Pedraza's most impactful contributions is the First Street Children's Garden, where he has spent over a decade teaching young people how to grow and prepare healthy food while providing fresh produce to residents, food banks, and local organizations. He also regularly assists elderly neighbors with everyday needs, reinforcing his reputation as someone who shows up and takes care of his community.

In addition, Mr. Pedraza raises and donates white doves for funerals and veterans' events, offering comfort to families at no cost. In 2025, he was formally recognized by the City of Rochester for his decades of service, mentorship, and leadership.

Mr. Pedraza is a veteran, lifelong community advocate, and neighborhood leader whose decades of service have helped shape and strengthen Rochester's Marketview Heights community.

Grounded in principle and guided by compassion, Mr. Pedraza remains a steadfast and deeply respected figure in Rochester.



MARTIN PEDRAZA WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR SAMRA G. BROUK

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

DOMINICK PEPE

Dominick Pepe served in the United States Army, the Air National Guard, the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve. He achieved the rank of Sergeant First Class and received an honorable discharge upon completion of 30 years of service.

Mr. Pepe started his military career as a Cadet in the Sea Scouts, attaining the rank of Chief Petty Officer. This ultimately helped him in his active military career.

In 1968, he was drafted into the Army and stationed at Fort Jackson for basic training. He then attended advanced training at Fort Gordon as a Communications Specialist and received a 72B MOS. Mr. Pepe was ordered overseas to the Southern European Task Force command with the 560th Tactical Communication Company, Vicenza, Italy and was initially assigned to the tactical company as a messenger. Once he received security clearance, he was assigned as a Communications NCO. Mr. Pepe's final assignment was NCOIC of the Fixed Communications Center. His tour of duty at SETAF was 12 months long.

After a long break, Mr. Pepe joined the Air National Guard. He was assigned to a communications unit from Long Island, spending a total of five years with the Air National Guard.

Upon discharge, Mr. Pepe joined the Army National Guard as a Finance Specialist, serving for five years with the 42nd Finance Company. The unit was subsequently disbanded, so he joined an Army Reserve unit as a Combat Arms Instructor, stationed in New Jersey. Trainees were instructed in weapons, first aid, map reading, and basic military professions.

Mr. Pepe's final assignment with the Army Reserve was with the 72nd Region Support Command Station at Fort Totten, New York. While stationed there, he attended school to achieve the 11B MOS. Their mission was to train military personnel in basic combat proficiencies at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Mr. Pepe earned numerous military awards and honors, including the National Defense Service Medal, Expert Marksmanship Tab, Good Conduct Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon, NCO Development Medal, Army Reserve Achievement Medal, and the Air Force Longevity Service Award.

A proud veteran, Mr. Pepe currently serves as the Post Adjutant and Membership Chairman of American Legion Woodhaven Post 118 in Queens. He also serves as the Queens County Adjutant and District 10 Chaplain.



*DOMINICK PEPE WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JOSEPH P. ADDABBO, JR.*

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MASSIEL PIMENTEL

Massiel Pimentel served as a member of the United States Army National Guard and achieved the rank of Sergeant. A dedicated community leader, she is a passionate advocate for female veterans and military families.

Ms. Pimentel honorably served in the U.S. Army National Guard from 2002 to 2010. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, she was assigned to anti-terrorism operations at John F. Kennedy International Airport, helping safeguard critical infrastructure during a heightened period of national security concern.

From 2009 to 2010, Ms. Pimentel was deployed to Camp Meade in Baghdad, Iraq, where she served as an armorer in support of deployed military personnel. In recognition of her exemplary military service, she received numerous honors and commendations, including the Army Commendation Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Armed Forces Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, and an honorable discharge.

Upon returning home, Ms. Pimentel continued her commitment to service through her active involvement with Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1666 in Yonkers, New York. She has become a tireless advocate for veterans, with a focus on addressing the unique needs of female veterans. Her work centers on improving access to quality medical care, mental health resources, and support services for women who have served in the Armed Forces. Through her advocacy and collaboration with fellow veterans, she has helped save lives and bring greater awareness to the effects of PTSD and other service-related conditions.

In 2008, Ms. Pimentel furthered her mission of public service by joining the Yonkers Police Department. In her current role, she assists in coordinating missing persons investigations and continues to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of her community. She is also an active member of the Westchester Hispanic Law Enforcement Association.

In addition to her professional and advocacy work, Ms. Pimentel remains involved in adaptive sports programs for disabled veterans. These programs promote community engagement, rehabilitation, and suicide prevention among veterans. Through her outreach efforts, she continues to remind veterans that they are never alone and that support and solidarity remain available to them.



MASSIEL PIMENTEL WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE AND
NYS SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOSCELYN RALPH

Josceelyn Ralph served with distinction in the United States Army Reserve and achieved the rank of Captain.

Mr. Ralph was born in Bartica, Guyana and received his primary and secondary education at Saint Stanislaus College. After immigrating to the United States in 1976, he enlisted in the Army Reserve and eventually became a non-commissioned officer.

Mr. Ralph received training in the 91C Program and was assigned to the now-closed 815th Station Hospital in New York, prior to transferring to the now-closed 3334th U.S. Army Hospital in Tampa, Florida.

Mr. Ralph graduated from the Helene Fuld College of Nursing and received a Direct Commission as a United States Army Officer from former President George H.W. Bush. He was assigned to the 343/344th Combat Support Hospital, where he continued with honor and distinction. Mr. Ralph is a graduate of the Academy of Health Sciences, where he received his diplomas in AMEDD Reserve Component Officers Basic and Advanced Courses.

Mr. Ralph provided medical support to the Joint Task Force Road Building Project, which was led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Alaska, and he supported overseas missions in Honduras and Nicaragua by providing medical and technical assistance. He retired in 2010 after more than 30 years of decorated service.

Mr. Ralph earned numerous awards and commendations, including the Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon, and the Army Reserve Component Overseas Training Ribbon.

In his civilian career, Mr. Ralph worked as a Staff Nurse at the Neuro ICU of SUNY Downstate Hospital, Assistant Patient Care Coordinator at Brooklyn Hospital Center, and a Nurse and Primary Case Manager at CVS/Coram Infusion Specialties Services.

Mr. Ralph is a member of several professional and community service organizations. He is a lifetime member of the Reserve Officers Association, a member of the 11th New York Regiment Honor Guard, and was recently promoted to the rank of Major by the 11th New York Regiment Volunteers. Mr. Ralph is a member of the NABMW and Lions Club International. He volunteers at VFW Post 5298 and the Hollis Garden food pantries.

Mr. Ralph and his lovely wife, Sandra, have been together for over 25 years.



JOSCELYN RALPH WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR LEROY COMRIE

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

Rafael Rodriguez Jr. served in the Army Reserve and achieved the rank of Sergeant E5.

Mr. Rodriguez was a part of three different operations: Operation Desert Storm (1990 to 1991), Combat Operations for Enduring Freedom (2002 to 2003), and Operation Enduring Freedom Joint Task Force (2006 to 2008).

In addition to these tours of duty, he took part in several humanitarian aid missions overseas in Honduras and Turkey. For his service to his Nation, Mr. Rodriguez was awarded the Combat Action Badge for engagement with the enemy in Iraq.

After serving for 24 years, Mr. Rodriguez retired from the military in 2008. He began helping veterans at the Volunteer Outreach Program at the Bronx Veterans Affairs Hospital.

As a volunteer, he assisted veterans with transportation to the VA Hospital, helped them with their claims for benefits, and provided educational assistance on how to apply for college, medical care, and registration.

Later, Mr. Rodriguez was appointed by the Bronx Borough President to assist the Veteran's Advisory Board. He remained there until 2020.

Along with his military career with the Army Reserve, Mr. Rodriguez was a part of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), where he was a Supervisor Caretaker for 24 years.

In the aftermath of 9/11, he worked in recovery efforts for NYCHA as a truck driver following the attacks.

After assisting in the recovery efforts, Mr. Rodriguez was activated by former President George W. Bush to serve with the First Army Reserve Unit to go to Iraq in 2002. For his deployment, he was assigned to the 773rd Transportation Company based out of Fort Totten, New York.

In his spare time, Mr. Rodriguez assists and mentors students at his former high school, Adlai E. Stevenson. He has dedicated himself in the areas of men's and women's track/field as an assistant coach, as well as helping with the men's football teams by empowering and mentoring the players to achieve their goals in their lives.



RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ JR. WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JOSÉ M. SERRANO

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

DIEGO RUBIO

Diego Rubio is a combat veteran who served as an Officer in the United States Army.

Mr. Rubio started his military career in the Simultaneous Membership Program. He later earned his commission as a United States Army Officer from the Early Commissioning Program at Valley Forge Military College, an accelerated and selective program, making him one of the youngest Officers in the Army at the time.

After his commission, Mr. Rubio remained in the National Guard before his active-duty time and continued his military service until 2018.

While in the National Guard, he began his civilian career at EY, where he quickly rose through the ranks and became a pivotal leader in the development and enhancement of the EY Veterans Network.

Mr. Rubio took the organization's Veterans Network to new heights by significantly increasing focus on recruiting, retention, and veteran community engagement. His advocacy and efforts have contributed to EY being regarded as one of the top military employers in recent years.

After his career at EY, Mr. Rubio was a Senior Vice President at Wells Fargo and later served as an executive at Morgan Stanley, where he continued to lead key initiatives at both Veterans Enterprise Resource Groups and support veteran initiatives internally, as well as in the community.

Currently, Mr. Rubio is an executive at TD Bank and helps lead and support various veteran initiatives within the bank.

Mr. Rubio has received numerous accolades and recognitions for his efforts within the veteran community, including being named one of Crain's 40 Under 40 Most Influential Veteran Executives and receiving the first-ever Hearts of Oak Award. He also sits on the boards for various veteran nonprofits and hopes to continue the great work that others before him have done.

Mr. Rubio is a proud graduate of Villanova University and currently lives in New York City.



*DIEGO RUBIO WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ERIK BOTTCHER*

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

KARLEEN SUSAN SAVIDGE

Karleen Susan Savidge served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Sergeant E-5.

She completed her basic training in 1976. Her advanced training took place at Redstone Arsenal in Ammo Storage. Ms. Savidge was awarded a primary MOS of 71L10, Administrative Specialist. In October 1978, she was assigned as a Unit Clerk with the 332nd Ordnance Battalion with a primary MOS 75B20. Other duties included serving as an Alternate Mail Clerk and service on the Race Relations/Equal Opportunity Council. Since she served as the Battalion Unit Clerk, Ms. Savidge traveled to subordinate units, 309th Ordnance Company and 962nd Ordnance Company, to assist them with administrative records problems. She also completed a Re-enlistment, Retention NCO Course in 1985. She was honorably medically disqualified for retention in 1986 after 10 years of service.

Ms. Savidge was awarded the Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal W/OLC, Army Service Ribbon, NCO Professional Development, and Army Reserve Component Overseas Training Ribbon for service in the Federal Republic of Germany. She also received three Letters of Appreciation from units she assisted and earned credit for participation in military exercises known as MOBEX and LOGEX. Ms. Savidge was awarded a Certificate of Achievement from 2nd Support Command (Corps) USA and Europe Seventh Army and qualified for a Sharpshooter Badge.

Her area of responsibility always received an inspection of satisfactory or better from higher headquarters. Ms. Savidge assisted other units that had administrative problems, which led to every unit passing inspection.

Upon leaving the military, Ms. Savidge joined the Barben-Jones Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1400 Auxiliary on November 3, 2008. She served as the Jr. Vice President for one year and then as the President for 10 years. Ms. Savidge managed the VFW Dining Room for Military Parties and used skills she learned in the military to help the VFW function more efficiently. During these years, she also helped her husband run their radio station and bookstore and manage 241 units of property.

Today, Ms. Savidge's greatest joy is still serving other veterans at the Barben-Jones VFW Post 1400 and the American Legion Post 61 in Watertown. She is an Officer at both Posts.

Ms. Savidge will never let her camaraderie with other veterans come to an end and will always be there for them!



KARLEEN SUSAN SAVIDGE WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR MARK WALCZYK

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOHN SCHROEDER

John Schroeder served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Sergeant.

Mr. Schroeder is a lifelong resident of Orchard Park, New York. He began basic training in January 1968 at Fort Dix, New Jersey before undergoing advanced infantry training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. In May 1968, he was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Rangers, 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam.

For his service, Mr. Schroeder was awarded the National Defense Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm.

Following his military service, he worked for the Wm. Wrigley Company for 32 years and retired as a Regional Sales Manager in 2007.

Over the years, Mr. Schroeder has continued to serve his community in numerous ways. He is a Life Member and past Commander of the VFW Post 6247 in Orchard Park and a 57-year member and Past President of American Legion Post 567. He is also a member of Amvets Post 219, Vietnam Veteran Post 77, Society of the Big Red One, and Disabled American Veterans.

He has been the Chairman of the Memorial Day Parade and Celebration in Orchard Park for the past 33 years. As Chairman of the Veterans Memorial Park revitalization project, Mr. Schroeder advocated for and helped secure over \$300,000 in donations and grants to install granite monuments, bronze statues, lighting, walkways, benches, and more. He continues to care for the park by planting flowers and helping with maintenance.

Mr. Schroeder is a member of the Orchard Park Lions Club and has served as Chair of multiple events. He received the Lions' highest honor, the Melvin Jones Award, for exemplary service to the Lions and the community. Mr. Schroeder was also honored with the Post of Fame Award for service to our Nation and community.

He is a graduate of Orchard Park High School. Mr. Schroeder and his late wife have two children and a granddaughter.

Mr. Schroeder's lifelong service and dedication to his country, his fellow veterans, and his community serve as an inspiration to all.



JOHN SCHROEDER WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR PATRICK M. GALLIVAN

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JOHN SHOTT

John Shott is a Purple Heart recipient who served as a Radioman and Gunner for the United States Army Air Corps during World War II.

Mr. Shott is the oldest of three brothers and made his first of many sacrifices when he took his younger brother's place to be drafted into the war.

After completing basic training in North Carolina and studying at Lynchburg College in Virginia, Mr. Shott was deployed with a B-25 bomber crew to the Philippines and flew his first combat missions before fighting in Taiwan and Vietnam. During his service, Mr. Shott flew 12 successful missions against the Japanese military.

On May 17, 1945, just months before the end of the war, his B-25 was shot down by anti-aircraft firepower near modern-day Taipei. All four of Mr. Shott's comrades were killed, leaving the soldier alone in the unfamiliar landscape of northwestern Formosa. The crew was declared Missing in Action (MIA), and Mr. Shott spent three days in the jungle before being captured by Japanese soldiers and transported to a Prisoner of War (POW) camp in the Philippines.

Mr. Shott survived four months of horrible conditions as a POW, including regular beatings, solitary confinement, undernourishment, and lice infestations. Finally, after Japan's surrender in August, he was released and escorted by a U.S. Navy destroyer to the Philippines before being transported to San Francisco for medical treatment.

For his bravery and valor, Mr. Shott received numerous awards and medals, including the POW Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Presidential Citation with two gold leaf clusters, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, WWII Victory Medal, and the Philippine Liberation Medal.

After returning home, Mr. Shott traveled to Philadelphia to visit the wife of one of his fallen comrades, William J. Kozak, who had requested that Mr. Shott make the trip in the case of his death. Mr. Shott and Helen Kozak went on to get married, and their partnership lasted until she passed away in 2000.

They resided in Syracuse, and Mr. Shott worked for American Airlines until he retired in 1983. This year, on Independence Day, Mr. Shott will celebrate his 104th birthday. He frequently walks in the North Syracuse Memorial Day Parade and regularly meets with friends at the local VFW Post.



JOHN SHOTT WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR CHRISTOPHER J. RYAN

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

BRIAN SILLIK

Brian Sillik is a Purple Heart recipient who served in the United States Army as a Helicopter Crew Chief during the Vietnam War.

Drafted into the Army in 1966, Mr. Sillik served in pressure-filled circumstances of ever-present combat conditions. Just three months into his tour, his unit was devastated by a mortar attack that killed three and injured 38, with Mr. Sillik among the wounded.

After three months of recovery in Japan, Mr. Sillik demonstrated his resilience by returning to his original unit in Vietnam to complete his tour. He was honorably discharged in 1968 and was later recognized in the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor.

Following his tour of duty, Mr. Sillik moved into a new life of duty, one filled with strong leadership and tireless service in the Town of Yorktown. His record of accomplishments reflects his military experiences and a lifelong commitment to the welfare of his fellow service members and his community.

Today, Mr. Sillik lives in the Jefferson Village community and serves as the Chair of the Jefferson Village Veterans Club. Under his tenure, membership in the Club has doubled, and he oversees its mission to provide a vital lifeline for senior veterans and their widows.

Mr. Sillik helped expand the Veterans "Wall of Heroes" in the Jefferson Village Clubhouse lobby, recognizing all the veterans who have lived in Jefferson Village. He serves as the Master of Ceremonies for Memorial and Veterans Day ceremonies at Jefferson Village and organizes educational forums and guest speakers. Mr. Sillik ensures that all veterans' outings are accessible to those with physical limitations so that no veteran is left behind.

Following the passing of his first wife after 44 years of marriage, Mr. Sillik has found further happiness with his wife, Jo-Ann, and together they share a family-filled life with a son, a daughter, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.



BRIAN SILLIK WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR PETE HARCKHAM

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

DONEE' SMALLS

Donee' Smalls served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant (SSG).

Ms. Smalls honorably served her country for more than 13 years, including deployments to Iraq and Kuwait during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. She served as a 92Y Unit Supply Sergeant and later as the Acting S4 for the Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, where she managed complex logistical operations, operational readiness, and mission-critical supply chain systems supporting military operations both domestically and overseas. In this leadership role, she oversaw accountability for organizational assets exceeding \$25 billion and was widely recognized for operational excellence, leadership under pressure, and mission readiness.

A decorated veteran, Ms. Smalls earned numerous awards and commendations, including the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal (3rd Award), Army Achievement Medal (2nd Award), Army Good Conduct Medal (4th Award), National Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon (2nd Award), Meritorious Unit Commendation, and the Combat Action Badge.

Ms. Smalls holds an MBA and is a transformational leader and nationally respected advocate for veterans experiencing homelessness. She currently serves as the Executive Director of Housing & Supportive Services for the New York City Department of Veterans' Services, where she leads one of the Nation's most impactful municipal initiatives focused on preventing and ending veteran homelessness.

A powerful force within veteran advocacy and public service, Ms. Smalls works to strengthen interagency coordination and ensure veterans receive equitable access to housing, resources, and supportive services. Her work has directly contributed to measurable reductions in shelter stays and increased permanent housing outcomes for vulnerable veterans and their families.

Ms. Smalls is deeply committed to uplifting women veterans and empowering underserved communities. She currently holds the title of Mrs. Military Manhattan 2026 and serves as the Sitting Commander for the Charity Adams 6888 Women's Chapter of the National Association for Black Veterans, reflecting her continued dedication to leadership, mentorship, advocacy, and the advancement of women veterans within the military and veteran community.

Above all, Ms. Smalls is a proud mother of two boys, whom she describes as her greatest inspiration and driving force. Every accomplishment, challenge overcome, and life impacted through her work is rooted in her desire to create a legacy of strength, purpose, and perseverance for her sons and for future generations.



*DONEE' SMALLS WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR CORDELL CLEARE*

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

LUIS SOLTERO-RODRIGUEZ

Luis Soltero-Rodriguez served in the United States Army and achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant (E-6).

A disabled combat veteran, Mr. Soltero-Rodriguez was honorably discharged. He was an active-duty member of the military who was deployed to Afghanistan in support of the Operation Enduring Freedom campaign in 2003-2004.

Mr. Soltero-Rodriguez served as a 13 Foxtrot (Fire & Support Specialist, light), providing indirect fire and support for both the Infantry and the Artillery units. He was stationed in Ft. Wainwright, Alaska and Ft. Drum, New York.

As the Director of the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs at Lehman College, Mr. Soltero-Rodriguez oversees its daily operation. The Office of Veterans and Military Affairs serves as a vital resource to veterans on various topics that include VA benefits and academic affairs. It is tasked with supporting military service members, veterans, and dependents in applying for and managing their VA education benefits.

In addition to the VA benefits enrollment certification, the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs serves as a centralized resource for inquiries about other VA benefits, including, but not limited to, guidance in the resolution of VA payment issues. It assists with current and updated information regarding VA education benefits, points of contact at the VA, and relaying important information regarding any changes that may impact education benefits.

Through Mr. Soltero-Rodriguez's guidance, the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs also provides numerous programmed events throughout the academic year to facilitate opportunities for networking with fellow veterans, the Lehman College community, and potential employers.

Under Mr. Soltero-Rodriguez's leadership, the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs continues to provide awareness and referrals to any internal and external resources in support of evolving needs. He is heavily focused on building and strengthening camaraderie within Lehman College's VA student community.

Mr. Soltero-Rodriguez was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico and raised in the Bronx.



LUIS SOLTERO-RODRIGUEZ WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR LUIS R. SEPÚLVEDA

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MARIE-MICHELLE STRAH, PhD

Marie-Michelle Strah, PhD, volunteered for the United States Navy Reserve in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks.

In 2005, Dr. Strah transferred to the Regular Army as a directly commissioned Medical Service Corps officer, leading theater-wide digital transformation and force realignment initiatives in response to evolving operational demands.

Dr. Strah earned her Master's degrees and doctorate at Cornell University, and she built a career focused on cybersecurity, cybercrime, and online extremist threats.

After multiple traumatic incidents, including three brain injuries, Dr. Strah was discharged in late 2008 as a Second Lieutenant and redirected her work toward improving outcomes for fellow veterans. She served as the IT lead for the initial outfitting and transition of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury at the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, advancing digital health, logistics, and mobile solutions that helped shape the integrated DoD/VA Polytrauma Network.

After returning to New York for polytrauma rehabilitation, Dr. Strah pursued graduate coursework and teaching at CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice under the GI Bill. A nationally recognized disability justice advocate, she received the CUNY Passantino Students with Disabilities Scholarship and the John Jay Graduate Achievement Award for triumph over extreme adversity, and she was inducted into the Delta Alpha International Honor Society for Disabled Individuals.

Dr. Strah's teaching and innovation were recognized with the John Jay College Digital Innovation Faculty Award, the Distinguished Teaching Prize, and selection as Provost Digital Faculty Fellow.

Dr. Strah continued to support other veterans with service-related disabilities, providing pro bono help to hundreds of veterans filing claims related to military sexual trauma. Currently, she volunteers as a yoga and meditation instructor with Veterans Yoga Project in New York City.

Since 2023, Dr. Strah has received awards for photography, fiber art, and music through the VA National Creative Arts Competition at VA New York Harbor. A passionate advocate for the power of adaptive sports, she participates with Team HOPE (Hope for the Warriors) and was recently named a Warfighter Ambassador for Move United to mentor other veterans in their adaptive sports and prosthetics journeys.



MARIE-MICHELLE STRAH, PhD, WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR LIZ KRUEGER

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

LARRY STRASSNER

Larry Strassner was born on May 22, 1947, in Rochester, New York. He graduated from Edison Tech High School in 1965 and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1966. He served on active duty until 1972 and continued his service in the United States Marine Corps Reserve until 1976, ultimately achieving the rank of E-7, Gunnery Sergeant.

Following boot camp, advanced infantry training, and military schooling, Mr. Strassner was first stationed at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina. He later served as a Sergeant in Vietnam (Chu Lai) from December 1967 through March 1969 as an Avionics Electrician, maintaining fixed-wing aircraft, including the F4B Phantom II. During this time, Mr. Strassner was assigned to the 1st Marine Air Wing, Marine Air Group 13, VMFA-323 "Death Rattlers." He also flew several missions in the UH-1E "Huey" helicopter as a door gunner. In 1968, he was wounded when a 122mm rocket exploded in his hooch (living quarters).

Mr. Strassner earned numerous commendations, including the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with three devices, Vietnam Campaign Medal with device, Naval Achievement Medal with Combat "V," Purple Heart, Navy Unit Commendation, Combat Action Medal, Presidential Unit Citation Medal, Good Conduct Medal with three devices, Rifle Sharpshooter Badge, Pistol Expert Badge, New York State Conspicuous Service Star, New York State Medal for Merit with Silver Shield, and the New York State Vietnam War Commemorative Medal. He later returned stateside and was stationed at MCAS Yuma, Arizona before being honorably released from active duty.

Professionally, Mr. Strassner built a distinguished 41-year career with General Motors and Delphi Corporation as a Manufacturing Engineering Supervisor. He furthered his education at the Rochester Institute of Technology, earning degrees in Mechanical Engineering in 1975 and Electrical Technology Engineering in 1985.

A dedicated volunteer, Mr. Strassner designed theatrical stage sets for the Greece Central School District and local theater groups for approximately 12 years, beginning in 2008. He has also served in leadership roles with American Legion Post 468, VFW Post 4658, and Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 20. Since 2009, he has been a devoted Honor Flight Rochester volunteer and trip leader, reflecting his unwavering respect for fellow veterans.

Prior to deploying to Vietnam, Mr. Strassner married Sandra in 1967, and together they had two daughters, Christine and Terri. In 1986, he remarried Juliann, and together they welcomed another daughter, Rebecca.



LARRY STRASSNER WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JEREMY A. COONEY

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MICHAEL SWEENEY

Michael Sweeney served in the United States Navy and achieved the rank of Mechanist Mate (MM2E5).

A West Babylon High School graduate, Mr. Sweeney proudly served in the Navy from 1986 to 1996, including during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm (1990-1991). His decade of service instilled in him a deep sense of duty and perseverance.

Transitioning to civilian life brought its own battles. After facing hardship, including a period of homelessness, Mr. Sweeney found hope and healing through the support of fellow veterans and local organizations.

At Beacon House, he began his journey to sobriety—now over four years strong. It was there that he connected with Paws of War, whose mission to support both ends of the leash deeply resonated with him. The organization matched Mr. Sweeney with a loyal service dog he named Storm, in honor of his military service during Desert Storm. Their bond has been life-changing, and the two have been inseparable ever since.

Mr. Sweeney now gives back as a passionate volunteer with Paws of War, playing an active role in its programs that rescue animals, provide service dogs to veterans and first responders, and help build a bridge to healing. He also volunteers his time with several other veteran-focused organizations, including General Needs, Island Harvest, Long Island Cares, the Vietnam Veterans Chapter, and Operation VEST. As a mentor, Mr. Sweeney offers support, guidance, and hope to fellow veterans navigating their own journeys.

Mr. Sweeney's service and dedication have earned him notable recognition, including being honored as the Military Hero of the Game at a New York Islanders game. In September 2024, his name was added to the Wall of Honor at Eisenhower Park. He also has a hometown service banner proudly displayed in West Babylon. This November, Mr. Sweeney will be recognized once again at a New York Jets game, where he'll hold the flag on the field.



MICHAEL SWEENEY WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR MONICA R. MARTINEZ

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MANOLIN TIRADO

Manolin Tirado is a veteran of the United States Army Reserve and New York National Guard.

Mr. Tirado served between 1981 and 1989 and achieved the rank of Specialist. His primary military occupation specialty was 96B, Military Intelligence Analyst.

Mr. Tirado has over 35 years of public administration work experience with several New York State and New York City agencies. He also taught for 17 years as an adjunct lecturer in political science at both Brooklyn College, CUNY and Metropolitan College of New York.

Mr. Tirado is the Founder and Chairperson of the New York City Transit Veterans Resource Group, the official MTA employee affinity group for veterans. Since 2018, the group has helped promote benefits outreach, career development, and mental health awareness programs among its veteran employees. In partnership with the SAR Flag Corp.'s Founder/President Kevin W. Hertell, Mr. Tirado has been working with the State and federal government to annually recognize September 22 as Veterans Suicide Awareness and Remembrance Day.

In addition to his dedication and work on behalf of those who served, Mr. Tirado is a board member of the Rumshock Veterans Foundation, which empowers veterans to enhance their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The Foundation's Rumshock Village is a residential community for veterans that provides affordable housing, hydroponic farming, transportation, and employment opportunities. The Foundation recently partnered with Orange County BOCES to have the Village's tiny homes constructed by students, with the first delivery completed this year.

Mr. Tirado's service to his community does not stop with his veterans' work. He is a founding member of his local NAACP branch, a member of American Legion Post 1, and formerly served on the Greenwood Lake planning board.

Born and raised in New York City, Mr. Tirado is a student of the New York City public school system. He attended Columbia University, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History-Sociology, and went on to attend Brooklyn College, graduating with a Master of Arts in Political Science.

Mr. Tirado resides in Greenwood Lake with his wife, Christine Rickoff-Tirado.



MANOLIN TIRADO WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JAMES SKOUFIS

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MICHAEL CARMINE VELLUCCI

Michael Carmine Vellucci enlisted in the United States Army and served as a Supply Specialist.

Mr. Vellucci is a dedicated public servant, decorated veteran, and a cornerstone of the Corona, New York community. His life's journey is a testament to the values of hard work, patriotism, and unwavering loyalty to both his country and his family.

Born and raised in the heart of the Bronx, Mr. Vellucci was raised amidst the vibrant culture of Arthur Avenue in Little Italy. This upbringing instilled in him a deep appreciation for community and heritage. Following his graduation from James Monroe High School, Mr. Vellucci answered the call of duty and was drafted into the Army.

During his military career, which spanned from 1969 to 1971, Mr. Vellucci initially served at Fort Carson, Colorado before being deployed to the Long Binh Air Base in Vietnam. Serving as a Supply Specialist under the 1st Logistical Command on the outskirts of Saigon, he played a critical role in maintaining the complex logistical support systems essential to the mission. His honorable service in the theater of war earned him the Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnam Campaign Medal, honors that reflect his commitment during a pivotal era in American history.

Upon returning to civilian life, Mr. Vellucci transitioned into the private sector, where he spent 30 successful years in the real estate industry. His professional acumen was matched only by his lifelong dedication to his fellow servicemen. As a lifetime member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Mr. Vellucci held significant leadership roles at the Flanders Field VFW Post 150 in Corona, Queens. Having served as Post Adjutant and currently serving as Junior Vice Commander, he continues to advocate for veterans' rights and foster a supportive network for those who served.

Beyond his professional and civic accomplishments, Mr. Vellucci's greatest pride is his family. He has been married to his lifelong sweetheart, Debbie, for 50 years — a milestone that speaks to a rare level of devotion. Together, they are the proud parents of their daughter, Dawn, and take immense joy in their 16-year-old grandson, Nicholas.

A longtime resident of Corona, Mr. Vellucci remains a respected figure whose life continues to be defined by service, stability, and a profound love for his community.



MICHAEL CARMINE VELLUCCI WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR JESSICA RAMOS

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

FREDERICO ALEXANDER WATSON

Frederico Alexander Watson enlisted in the United States Army and attained the rank of Private First Class (PV1).

Mr. Watson demonstrated an early commitment to his adopted country when he enlisted in the Army just three months after his arrival. He served honorably from May 14, 1969, to May 13, 1971. He is the seventh of nine children who were born in Panama and immigrated to the United States of America in 1969.

During his military tenure, Mr. Watson completed training in North Carolina and at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and he served in Alaska. His final assignment was with Company A, 1st Battalion, 66th Armor, 2nd Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas under the Fourth United States Army.

In recognition of his dedicated service, he received an honorable discharge. Following his military service, Mr. Watson carried forward the discipline, resilience, and strong work ethic he developed in the Army into his civilian life.

He began a career with the General Post Office in Manhattan, where he worked as a general mechanic. Over the course of his career, Mr. Watson became known for his reliability and perseverance, ultimately retiring in 2003 after years of dedicated service.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Mr. Watson has remained deeply committed to serving his community. A longtime resident of East Flatbush, he has been an active member of Community Board 17, contributing his time and leadership to the Parks and Beautification, Sanitation, and Public Safety Committees.

Mr. Watson also volunteers regularly at his church, reflecting his enduring dedication to uplifting those around him. His life is a testament to service, integrity, and steadfast loyalty.

Mr. Watson continues to embody the values of duty and allegiance — to the United States Constitution, to his fellow soldiers, and to his community — making him a deserving nominee for the Veterans Hall of Fame from Senate District 20.



FREDERICO ALEXANDER WATSON WAS SELECTED
AS A 2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ZELLNOR Y. MYRIE

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RON WATSON

Ron Watson served in the United States Marine Corps and achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Enlisting in 1982, he was the Honor Graduate at MCRD, Parris Island. He served in the Marine Corps for a 22-year active-duty career, retiring in 2004.

Mr. Watson was commissioned through the Enlisted Commissioning Program and became a Field Artillery Officer. His assignments included Platoon Commander, Battery E, 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines, Camp Pendleton, CA; G-1 Operations, III Marine Expeditionary Force, Okinawa, Japan; Fire Support Officer, 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Special Operations Capable (SOC); Battery Commander, Battery E, 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines, 22nd MEU SOC; and Operations Officer, 26th MEU SOC. He deployed with Marine Expeditionary and other units on the USS *Saipan* (twice), USS *Gum*, USS *Guadalcanal*, USS *Austin*, USS *Shreveport*, and the USS *Blue Ridge*.

While serving in Marine Special Operations Units, Mr. Watson participated in Operations Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait; Provide Promise and Deny Flight in the former Yugoslavia; Continue Hope in Mogadishu, Somalia; Joint Forge in Bosnia; and Silent Lance in the Adriatic Sea. He also served as a Senior Staff Officer at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, negotiating agreements amongst the NATO and former Warsaw Pact nations, and as the Operations Officer of Camp Lejeune's Special Operations Training Group. His final assignment was as the Inspector Instructor, 3rd Battalion, 14th Marines, Philadelphia.

After retiring from military service, Mr. Watson enjoyed a second career with the Lockheed Martin Corporation, where he served as a Business Development Principal, pursuing Homeland Security and Defense solutions.

Mr. Watson continues to serve military and veterans' causes in the Bronx. He is a member of the American Legion Post 156, a Life Member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9960, and a Life Member of the Marine Corps League, Yankee Detachment.

He participates in studies at the Bronx VA Hospital, serves on the 14th Congressional District Service Academy Nomination Board, and is the Chair of the annual Bronx Veterans Parade in New York State's 34th Senate District, Throgs Neck.

Mr. Watson grew up in the Bronx and graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School, Westchester Community College, and East Stroudsburg University.



RON WATSON WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR NATHALIA FERNANDEZ

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

GARY A. WOOD

Gary A. Wood is a United States Navy veteran Aviation Boatswain's Mate, railroad communications professional, and POW/MIA advocate dedicated to ensuring missing service members are never forgotten. His advocacy focuses on MIAs and POWs from the Revolutionary War forward and on improving treatment of veterans affected by service experiences, particularly Vietnam-era veterans.

Mr. Wood volunteered for the Navy at age 17 and served from 1971 to 1975. He worked in air crash rescue for two years at Midway Island and was stationed in Okinawa and the Philippines. He later served with Anti-Submarine Warfare Patrol Squadron VP-19 in Okinawa and the Philippines.

After his military service, Mr. Wood worked for Conrail for 37 years in the Signal and Communications Departments. He served as Co-Chair of the Safety Committee and was recognized for safety leadership. He earned a diploma as a Digital Electronics Technician from DeVry University in 1998, which helped him create a Communication Technician position.

Mr. Wood is active in Rolling Thunder NY Chapter 1, which he joined in 2014. He has served as Board member, Chairman, and President since 2018. Rolling Thunder's mission is to promote POW/MIA awareness and support veterans and military families.

Mr. Wood's community work includes speaking at the 2024 rededication of the Fort Greene Prison Ship Martyrs Monument in Brooklyn, leading Memorial Day parade participation, organizing VA Hospital bingo events, supporting Brooklyn community festivals, and coordinating holiday events for veterans at St. Albans.

Mr. Wood has received multiple honors, including the Harriman Memorial Safety Medal (2000–2005), Conrail safety and quality recognition, a 2016 U.S. Army Garrison Fort Hamilton Certificate of Support, a 2016 Rolling Thunder Certificate of Appreciation, and 2025 citations from the New York City Council and the New York State Assembly for veteran service.

Throughout his career and volunteer service, Mr. Wood has remained committed to honoring fallen service members, supporting living veterans, and educating the public about POW/MIA issues through outreach events, ceremonies, and community engagement. His work continues to focus on remembrance, recognition, and advocacy at both local and national levels. Mr. Wood remains dedicated to veteran causes and ongoing POW/MIA awareness initiatives across communities nationwide today and beyond.



GARY A. WOOD WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR STEPHEN T. CHAN

2026



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

MICHAEL ZEMSER

Michael Zemser answered the call to serve his country with honor and dedication by enlisting in the United States Navy in October 1961. He faithfully served for 30 years until his retirement in 1991 and achieved the rank of Yeoman First Class.

During his distinguished naval career, Mr. Zemser was stationed in Hawaii aboard the USS *Barbel* (SS-580), the last non-nuclear submarine, and he later served aboard the USS *Bonefish* (SS-582) during the Vietnam War. He demonstrated extraordinary resilience, including enduring five weeks submerged during a time of national crisis following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

In recognition of his exemplary service, Mr. Zemser was awarded the Vietnam Service Medal, Navy Good Conduct Medal, Navy Expeditionary Medal, and Navy Sharpshooter Medal.

Continuing his commitment to public service, Mr. Zemser joined the New York Police Department in 1968, where he served with distinction. He retired as a Detective, exemplifying dedication both as a Navy serviceman and law enforcement officer.

For 25 years following his retirement, Mr. Zemser remained devoted to his community by working as a part-time security guard for a local school, ensuring the safety and well-being of others.

Mr. Zemser has demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment as a lifelong member of the Long Island Base Submarine Veterans organization, serving as its Commander for 12 years and continuing to remain actively involved. He also maintains a lifetime membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Mr. Zemser's life reflects a deep-rooted tradition of service, following in the footsteps of his father, a World War II Navy veteran who served on PT boats and grew up as the eldest of three brothers in Far Rockaway, New York.

He remains committed to uplifting others through his volunteer work, visiting children battling cancer, supporting veterans in nursing homes, and participating in charitable events that raise funds for causes such as Kaps for Kids.

Mr. Zemser enriches his life and the lives of those around him through his passions for travel, dancing, bowling, and spending cherished time with his fiancée and her family.



MICHAEL ZEMSER WAS SELECTED AS A
2026 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR ALEXIS WEIK

2026

VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Patrick Abrams	George V. Baker
Robert Addison	Emil Baker
Michael Adrian	Reverend Dr. Tony Baker, Sr.
Alex Aesch, Jr.	Jai Bams
Joaquin Afonso	Margaret Bandy
Murat Akaydin	Fred Baptiste
George Alexander, Jr.	Herbert Barret
Charles H. Alexander, Jr.	John F. Barry
William B. Allendorph	John Barwinczok
Frank X. Allkofer	Michael J. Basla
Sullivan Alois	Ronal Bassham
Jerry Alperstein	Wayne Baumgartner
Janet Altacho-Davis	William A. Baxter
Ed Altenau	Glyger G. Beach
Querino A. Alteri	William Beatty
Ismile Althaibani	George W. Becker
Abraham Althaibani	Ray Beebe
Hector F. Alvarado	Barbara Beebe
Ambrose Anderson	Sergeant Gary Beikirch
Arma E. Andon	David Bellavia
Joseph G. Angelino	Joe Bello
Steven John Antonacci	Vicki Bello
Leroy Richard Archible	Analiza Benjamin
Robert W. Armenio	LaShaun Benjamin, Sr.
Leonard B. Aronica	James Robert Benzinger
Raymond Arroyo	Justin Berbig
W. Gerard Asher	Donald Bernstein
Allan P. Atwell	Clayton W. Bihl
Arthur G. Austin, Jr.	Charles E. Bilbrey
Ed Babor	Richard Bingham
Roman Baca	Nancy Bird
Miguel Bach	Stephen C. Biscotti
Lawrence Badger	James Black



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Lee Blackmon
LaTanga Blair
James Edward Blakely
Joseph D. Blanck
Edward R. Blankenhorn
Walter Blum
Arcangelo Bollella
Henry Bolus
Floyd Sanford Bonds, Jr.
Edward Borowski
John Bourges
Deborah Bourne-Alley
W. Michael "Mike" Bowen
Ralph Elliot Bowen
Steven W. Bowman
John F. Boyd, Sr.
Joseph H. Brady
John J. Brady
Daniel J. Brandi
Daniel Breier
Judge Michael J. Brennan
Michael G. Breslin
Douglas Brewster
Walter E. Bridgers
David Brisbase
George R. Broadhead
Dr. Cleopatra Brown
Joe Robert Browne
William Brustman
Eugene Bryant
Thomas Bullaro
Tom Buono
Mario Buonpane
Eugene "Gene" Burch
Sylinthia Burges
Michael Burke
John Patrick Burke
Rosetta Y. Burke
Harold Burke, Jr.
Willie Burks
Daniel J. Bush
Thomas J. Butler, Jr.
Richard L. Butterfield
Edward L. Butts, Jr.
James Byler
William J. Byrne
Alberto Caiella
Ralph Calabrese
Anthony Caminiti
Julixa Campusano
Irving Cantor
William Capodanno
Phil R. Capraro
Jay Caputo
Ruby Carlisle-Thomas
Peter Carlo
Clayton Carpenter
Alyssa Carrion
Edwin Cartoski
Tom Carty
Eric Carver
Anthony Casamento
Frank Casazza
Captain Patrick J. Cassidy
Anthony Catalano
Mary E. Cavanagh



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Joseph M. Cetta	Scott R. Cox
Joe J. Ceurter	Warren Craig
Ralph L. Chinelly	Thomas Cray
Bernard Boowah Chong	Phyllis Mills Creamer
Michael J. Christiano	Arthur M. Cromarty
David J. Clark	Harold G. Cronin
Bob Clark	George C. Crouch III
Eugene "Mickey" Clark	Roswell L. Crozier, Jr.
Sidney T. Clark	Betsy Crumity
Roberto Clotter	Dr. Barry R. Culhane
Michael P. Cody, Jr.	Patrick J. Cunningham
Joseph A. Cognitore	Francis S. Currey
Sydney Cole	Peter Cuthbert
Dr. Richard Collins	Christopher Czarnecki
Peter Colombo	Jordan Czerniawski
Ventura Colon	John Czuhanych
Frank Colon, Jr.	Sebastian D'Agostino
John Compitello	Silviu Dan Sr.
Joseph Conace	Sam Danial
Douglas Condit Jr.	Robert Danke
John Condon	Anthony J. D'Arpino
Sal Conforto	Clarence Dart
Leonard B. Connelly	John S. Davanzo
Martin C. Connor Jr.	Colonel Stephanie E. Dawson
Rick Connors	Donald Day
John Emmett Connors	Prisco De Angelis
Arthur P. Coon	Kathy Dean
John Cooper, Jr.	Benjamin A. DeFonce
Claude S. Copeland, Jr.	Matthew J. DeGregorio
John Cortese	Melissa Del Valle-Ortiz
Anthony J. Costanzo	George S. Delianites
Marc Coviello	Stephen Delorenzo
Lee Covino	Edward T. Dempsey



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Stephen Dennis
Patrick W. Devine
Michael DeVito, Jr.
Alice Psirakis Diacosavvas
John Diana
Clifton Stanley Diaz
Joshua Jose Diaz
Eugene DiGiacomo
John T. Digilio
Christopher Dill
Frank J. DiNuzzo, Jr.
Carmine DiPasquale
Teddy Ditchek
Theodore Dixon
Glenn Dodge
Robert Frank Dolcimascolo
Michael A. Donaldson
Max Donatelli
Gerald Donnellan
Ryan Donnelly
Rocco V. D'Onofrio
Jerry D'Onofrio, Sr.
John C. Donovan
John Drago
Walter George Drago
William DuBose
Elana Duffy
Joseph Dugan
John Dulisse
Herbert J. Dunmore, Jr.
Howard Dunn
James H. Dunn
Randy Dupree

James Durkin
Harold Dworetzky
Dr. Max Egelfeld
Sharon Earley-Davis
Nelson Eddy
Chester Edwards
Gene Edwards
George W. Egan
Geno Peter Egiziaco, Sr.
Steven W. Ellis
Lt. Col. Paul Engel, Jr.
Armen Enkababian
Harold James Enstice
Nicholas Erickson
Ralph Esposito
Michael J. Esposito, Jr.
Buddy Esptein
Marisa Estrella
Al Etkin
Charles A. Eustis
Richard Evers
John Every
Barbara J. Exum
Sal Famularo
Joseph R. Farina
Derek J. Farley
Ben Farnan
Paul Albert Feddern
Fedele Family
Thomas Feeley
Dominick Feeney
Curtis Feggins
Edwin Feliciano, Jr.



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Julio A. Feliu
Gayelle Marie Felix
Blossom Ferguson
Aphiel Fernandez
Luz M. Fernandez-Aviles
Anthony M. Ferrarese
Eric Fetterman
Alan Armand Feuer
Donald Fida
Edward Field
Russel C. Fielding
Dominic Filippone
Dennis Fink
Robert A. Fire
Robert L. Fish
Floyd Fisher
Lawrence Fisher
James Fitzgerald
Peter Fiumegreddo
Gary L. Flaherty
Kenneth B. Fleiger
Eddie Fletcher
Osceola Louis Fletcher
John Flynn
Joseph S. Forte
William J.J. Forte
Freddy Fowler, Sr.
John Foy
Joseph T. Fraccola
William Arthur Francis
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Casey Frankoski
Muriel O. Franzier
John Fratangelo

Jeffrey W. French
Kathie Freston
Anthony L. Frusciante, Sr.
Father Moritz Fuchs
Joan Furey
Anthony J. Gabriel, Jr.
Joshua Gaccione
Diana B. Gaetano
Armando Galella
Joseph Gallant Jr.
Tessie Shirley Pierce Garber
Ricardo Garcia
Brian Garcia
William Garnett, Jr.
Melvin Garrett
Edwin L. Garriss
Luke Gasparre
Catalina Gavia
Frank F. Gee
Joseph A. Gentiluomo
Merlin German
Joseph Germano
Margaret Gill
James Gillen
Richard T. Gillespie
Vito Giobbie
P. Earle Gleason
Peter J. Glennon
J. Leo Glynn
George Godfrey
Peter K. Goebel
Albert Goldberg
Roberta Goldenberg



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Howard Goldin
The Honorable Yadhira Gonzalez-Taylor
Peter Gong
Hector Carmelo Gonzalez
Roxana Gonzalez-Jimenez
Arthur Grabiner
Ryan Graham
Tony Graziano
Corporal Abner Greenberg
Lawrence Gregory
J. Donald Griffin
Stephen T. Grogan
Patrick Gualtieri
Dan Guida
Frederick Gundel
Henry Gurney
Russell A. Guthrie
Jordan Christian Haerter
James A. Haggerty
John L. Halford, Sr.
Brian J. Hall
Colonel Elizabeth A.D. Hanson
Bob Harder
Thomas James Harnisher
Jack W. Harrington
George M. Harrington
Ronnie Hart
James A. Haynes III
Marlene Dietrich Heath
Rheyser Henry
John Hensel
Thomas J. Heron II
Wallace C. Higgins

Thomas F. Higgins
John Higgins
Sharon Hightower
Samuel Hill, Jr.
Eva Hinds
Charles Lee Hinkleman, Sr.
Thomas Michael Hoare
Walter Hobbs
Andrea H. Hodge
Harry K. Hodge
James A. Hodges, Sr.
Ann Marie Hogancamp
Frank Hollister
Peter Holowecki
Christopher Holshek
Daniel J. Honsinger
Dr. Olivia J. Hooker
David R. Hooks, Jr.
Tom Horn
Vincent Horrigan
Katherine Horton
Ihor John Hoshowsky
Morrison John Hosley, Jr.
Marie Carmel Houanche
Detrel Howell
John "Jack" Edward Howlett
Jukay Hsu
Walter Hughes
William Hughes
Indiana Hunt
Luis F. Hurtado
Henderson Leroy Hutchinson
Phuong Huynh



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Renee Imperato
Joe J. Ingino
James Irwin
Daniel Izzo
Sandra Jablonski
Andrew P. Jackson
Shirley M. Jackson
Duane Jackson
Harry Janson, Sr.
Richie Jarcho
Marvin R. Jeffcoat
Jewish War Veterans
Charlie Johnson
Charles A. Johnson
George A. Jones
Ellsworth Jones
Neil K. Jordan
Robert Jorolemon
Peter Ethrain Joseph
William R. Joyce
Randy Jurgensen
Jason A. Kaatz
Howard Kalachman
William K. Kastner
Anthony Kavouras
Donald Keeney
Richard R. Keiser
James M. Kennedy
J. Arthur Kieffer
Michael Kilano
Charles John Kilbride
Lieutenant Benjamin Ralph Kimlau
Terence L. Kindlon
Tyrone King
Stephen M. Kinne, MD
Edward S. Kirkland
Walter Kittle
Ted N. Kniazuk
Keith Koster
Harry Kreter
Jaroslaw Kril
Ralph Kring
Peter Kurpeawski
Francis La Duc
Sabrina Lacy
Mary P. LaManna
Frank LaMarsh
Eladio Lamboy
Mike LaNassa
Joseph Landi
William J. Larkin
Joseph A. LaRocco
Robert Laskaris
Elder Stacey S. Latimer
Megan Leavey & Rex
Omar Lebron
Vanessa A. Lee
Gregory T. Lee
Nancy Lieutenant-Colon
Andre LeGall
Chad Lennon
Peter S. Lennon
Pete Leon
Aaron Leonard
Ryan Lepore
John J. Levulis



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Michael Lewandowski

Leslie Ellis Lewis

James Licardi

Lewis Licht

Donald Linborg

Sean Lindstrom

James Lint

Mike Liquori

Herbert C. Loesch

Corine Lombardo

John B. Long

Ramon Augusto Lopez

Sergeant Luis Lorenzo

Tracy J. LoTemple

Joseph Lowe

Daniel Luciano

Israel Lugo-Jorge

Louis Lupinacci

Michael C. Lutz

Jean Otto MacIntosh

Donald Maciver

Arthur Maggy

Luke A. Magliaro, Jr.

William T. Mahan

Martin G. Mahar

Jim Mahoney

Joseph Bert Mahoney

Serphin R. Maltese

Alexander Mandara

Robert Mandel

Dr. Donald Mandel

Walter Mankoff

David Mann

Ismael M. Manolias

Hariton Marachilian

Peter Maraday

Robert Marcor

Max Marcus

Regina Gallagher Marengo

Walter Maresco

Benjamin W. Margolius

Tom Marinello

John J. Maroon

Tony Marsella

Donald Marshall

Dave Marshall

Nancy Marte

Luis Martinez

John Martinko

Job Mashariki

Lance Edward Massey

Lewis W. Matthews, Sr.

Charles A. Maushardt

Bruce Mayfield

Michael L. Mayne

Silvio Mazzella

Nicholas L. Mazzola

Colleen McCarthy

Robert McCarthy

Frank McClement

Wendy Charece McClinton

John J. McCormick

William McDonald

Terry McGuire

Robert Joseph McGuirol, Jr.

John McHugh, Sr.



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Willie McLaughlin, Jr.

Robert McLean

Francis McLean

Daniel McMahon

Jeff McMillan

Louvenia McMillan

Thomas A. McMillen

June Brown McNiven

Eugene McSherry

Steve Mejia

Ray Melens

Jonathan De Sola Mendes

David J. Menegon

Charles W. Merriam

James W. Merritte

Dina M. Michael

Glennie Millard

Patrick W. Miller

Morris Miller

Louis Miller

Frederick H. Miller, PhD

Private First Class Thomas Francis Minogoe

Lester Modelowitz

Rafael Molina

Joseph Mondello

Matthew Mondoux

Karl W. Monson

Hector Carmelo Montes

Dabney N. Montgomery

Thomas Mooney

Charles J. Moore

Ken Moore

Rodney K. Moore

Paul Morales

Francisco Morales

Bob Moran

Frank Morea

Maureen F. Morgan

Kevin Moriarty

Thomas J. Morley, Jr.

Robert Morrill

Roosevelt Morring

John L. Mosher

Alan Moskin

Ralph A. Mottola

Bill Moye

Jim Mullarkey

John W. Mullen, Jr.

Francisco Muniz II

Charles Murphy

Kenneth Murphy

Bob Murphy

John Murphy

Lester R. Muse Jr.

Lt. Col. Joseph T. Nader

Nardolillo Brothers

Frank S. Naro

Paul Narson

Kamal Nasser

Charles A. Navarino

Tricia Navarro-Caraballo

William Nazario

Stephen Neftleberg

James B. Neider

Bill Nelson

Anthony C. Nesci, Sr.



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Larry Neumann
Frank Nicolazzo
Stephen Nicolino
Freddie R. Nielsen
Pedro Nieves
Louis S. Nigrello
W. Robert Nolan
Kevin F. Nolan
John Nonna
Robert Noonan
Deborah M. Norman
Zulma L. Novoa
John P. Nowhitney
Laquasia Nunez
Kenneth Nurse
Milton Nussdorf
Louis Levi Oakes
Mark P. O'Brien
John O'Connor
Michael Gerald O'Connor
Dennis O'Doherty, Sr.
Kevin O'Hare
Michael O'Kane
Paul O'Keefe
Steven Oliver
Michael H. Ollis
Richard A. Olsen
Robert E. O'Malley
Alirio Orduna
Michael Ortiz
Benjamin Osborn
Ralph J. Osterhoudt
Rosa Daysha Otero-Walsh
Stephen Owen
Brian R. Page
Dr. Elliot S. Palais
Adolph Panetta
Joseph A. Panzardi, Sr.
Calvin Parker
Renny Parker
Eugene Parrotta
Lawrence C. Parry
George E. Parsons
Michael Pascal
Carmen Pascarella, Jr.
Albert Paviglianti
William H. Payne
Arthur Pearlman
Ann Marie Pearson
Richard Pecci
Richard Pedro
Corey Pegues
George "Lee" Penney
Christopher R. Perkins
Betty Perkins-Carpenter, PhD
John J. Perrone
Jacquemaë Perrotta
Robert Persichitti
Frank C. Pesesky
Reginald Peterson
Robert Piazza
Louis Joseph Picarazzi
Thomas Pike
Ronald J. Pillozzi
Vito Pinto
Alfonso Piscitelli



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Gerard Placide
Michael Plummer
Joseph G. Pollicino
Dre Popow
Ruben R. Pratts
Ralph Presciutti
James E. Prevete
Audet Price
Ruby Dawn Price
Ermondo Puccio
Frank J. Pullano
Hal Queyor
Claude Quick, Jr.
Katherine Quinones
Anthony Rabasco
Katherine Ragazzino
Danylo Rakowsky
Darrell Randolph
The Honorable Charles B. Rangel
Alphonse Joseph Ranni
Concepcion Ranocchia
Debbera M. Ransom
Robert Rapone
Samuel Ravelo
Bing Crosby Reaves, Sr.
Samuel L. Reddic
Richard Redmond
Kristyn Briez Reed
James John Regan
Veronica D. Reid
Carol Reneau, EdD
Salvatore Riccobono
Stanlee Richards

Carlton Richardson
Ben Richardson
Luther L. Richardson
James J. Richardson
Paul Rieckhoff
John Ringlehan
Robert Tom Riordan
Battle of the Bulge Ritchie
Keith Rivera
Jose A. Rivera-Carrion
Gaston Roberge
Katherine Robinson
William Robinson
Terrence L. Roche
Adam Roche
Jorge M. Rodriguez
George Rodriguez
Joselyn Iris Rodriguez
Yashira Rodriguez
Lecia A. Rodriques-Whyte
Dave Rogers
Gloster Rogers
Karl R. Rohde
Marlene L. Roll
Sigilfredo Roman
Francis H. Romanitch
Frank Romeo
First Sgt. Joseph Ronda
Albert Warner Rood
Jestine Roper
Jorge L. Rosario
Henry Rosenzweig, Sr.
Henry Ross



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RECIPIENTS 2005-2025

Edward F. Rossley
Colonel Jeffrey D. Roth
Patrick R. Rourk
David L. Roustum
Oscar Ruiz
Paul "Rizzo" Russo
Frank Russo
Joseph Ruszala
Kevin M. Ryan
Matthew George Francis Ryan
Eddie Ryan
Maria Del Pilar Ryan, PhD
Stanley Rychlicki
Anthony Salimbene
Russell J. Salvatore
Raymond A. Salvie
John B. Sampson
Dawn Samuel
Janet Santeramo
Anthony Santoro
Michele Sardo
Vincent James Scali
Thomas Scardino
Patsy J. Scarpato
Chester A. Scerra
Gary Schacher
Philip Schatzle
Richard R. Scheiner
Charles "Jeff" Scherz
Wendell H. Schillinger
Tom Schreck
Joel Schumacher
Charles M. Schuster

Dominic Sciallo
Richard Albert Scott
Costantino "Gus" Scutari
Amando "Army" Seccurra
Arthur Seidman
Thomas G. Seifert
Ricky L. Semple
Louis Sepersky
Timothy Giles Serwinowski
Thomas F. Sharpe
Clarence Sheley
Stanley Sherman
Alice R. Simpson
Jason B. Skinner
Joseph M. Skinner, Sr.
Scott Smiley
Cedric V. Smith
John D. Smith
Eugene G. Smith
Richard Smith
Phillip C. Smith
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