

11.3.23 | Celebrating Volunteerism



AGING UNBOUND

OLDER NYers DAY 2023



Office for the Aging

Older New Yorkers' Day

11/3/23

Virtual event

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

—Dr. Suess

Thank you for attending!

NYSOFA Staff



Our mission is to help older New Yorkers be as independent as possible for as long as possible through advocacy, development, and the delivery of person-centered, consumer-oriented, and cost-effective policies, programs, and services that support and empower older adults and their families, in partnership with the network of public and private organizations that serve them.

The following pages contain the 2023 Older New Yorkers' Day awardees for the counties we serve. We salute them for their contributions.

The following awardees were submitted by area agency on aging (AAA) directors as an expression of their gratitude for the service of their volunteers.

NYSOFA thanks the AAA directors for providing us with such thoughtful submissions and allowing us to share them in this commemorative booklet.



Office for the Aging

KATHY HOCHUL

Governor

GREG OLSEN

Acting Director

Dear Friends:

Every year, NYSOFA invites New York's 59 county Offices for the Aging and their partners to nominate older adults who have made incredible contributions in their community through civic engagement and volunteerism. It is my distinct privilege to honor this year's nominees for Older New Yorkers' Day 2023.

New York State truly values the contributions made by these nominees and the countless other volunteers across the state that make New York a great place to live for all ages. Each year in the state, nearly 1 million volunteers age 60 and over contribute 495 million hours of community service at an economic value of \$13.8 billion. Beyond volunteering, New York's 4.6 million older adults provide pivotal intellectual, social and economic capital to our state.

In recognition of your positive impact, Governor Hochul declared May 2023 as Older Americans Month, saying, "We honor New York's older adults for their contributions and further our commitment to continue providing for older adults as they age, helping them maintain independence and a good quality of life." Furthermore, in November of 2022, Governor Hochul initiated the Master Plan for Aging (MPA), which coordinates existing and new state policies and programs for older adults and their families and those living with disabilities. A major goal of the MPA is to help individuals successfully age in place and continue to be active and engaged in their communities – as exemplified by the profiles of volunteerism presented in this program book for Older New Yorkers' Day 2023.

In addition to our honorees, I also thank New York's 59 Area Agencies on Aging who are essential partners, serving over 1 million New Yorkers each year. Their work is made possible in large part because of volunteers who donate their time to programs like transportation, home-delivered meals, and many others, including New York State's Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) and the Health Insurance Information, Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP), which we specially recognize on Older New Yorkers' Day.

To all of our nominees and volunteers across New York, thank you for your unwavering dedication to your community and the admirable example you set for others.

Sincerely,

Director
Greg Olsen

2023 GOVERNOR'S EXEMPLARY SERVICE AWARD

AWARDEE:

**Russell E.
Diethrick, Jr.**

Chautauqua County



Russell E. Diethrick, Jr. is a steadfast community leader who has served dozens of organizations in a leadership style marked by quiet strength. Diethrick's dedication to any cause is exemplified by his consistent presence and thoughtful participation, always respectful of differing viewpoints. He embodies the essence of a true gentleman and is sought after as a revered influencer within the community. His accolades extend to both his professional achievements and his significant volunteer contributions, with the local professional baseball stadium proudly bearing his name.

Diethrick has especially played an important leadership role in many groups that support older adults, including the United Senior Council, representing all local senior clubs. He was a founding member of his community's Office for Aging advisory board in 1973, offering his guidance during his remarkable 50-year tenure on the board, often assisting in the search for new leadership.

A graduate of Jamestown High School, class of 1952, Diethrick is married to June Christensen and maintains close ties with his sister, brother-in-law, nieces, and nephews. His service extends beyond the community, as he served in the U.S. Army Reserves from 1957 to 1963. Professionally, Diethrick worked at Marlin Rockwell Corporation from 1952 to 1964 before joining the City of Jamestown in 1958. He began as an Assistant Recreation Director and eventually ascended to the position of Director of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation in 1972. In 1991, he transitioned to Director of Development for Babe Ruth League, Inc. until 1993, followed by his role as Community Development Officer for Jamestown Savings Bank until 2015.

Diethrick's dedication to his community extends to the realm of radio, where he collaborates on several talk shows with Jim Roselle, Dennis Webster, and Andrew Hill. His lifelong mission revolves around making Jamestown and Chautauqua County exceptional places to live, work, and age gracefully.

"Humbly I would suggest there is no greater honor than building on the incredible foundation of generations past," he advises. "Use your God-given gifts of mind, body, and soul to inspire generations to come to add to this miraculous foundation."



HIICAP
Health Insurance Information,
Counseling and Assistance
Program

2023 HIICAP COUNSELOR OF THE YEAR

Elaine Gannon

Photo not provided

Elaine Gannon's dedication to volunteering as a Health Insurance Information, Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) Medicare counselor since 1998 has made a significant difference in the lives of countless New Yorkers. Her expertise has been a source of support for individuals navigating the complex world of Medicare and related health insurance.

Over the years, Gannon has extended her assistance to hundreds of individuals, offering guidance both in-person and over the phone. Her impact has not only been informational but also financial, as she has assisted many Medicare beneficiaries in applying for cost-saving programs, resulting in substantial savings amounting to thousands of dollars. Gannon's commitment to mentorship has further enriched her volunteer work, as she has guided numerous individuals who have gone on to become successful counselors themselves.

A native New Yorker, Gannon's roots trace back to the Bronx, and she currently resides in Queens. Her career spanned an impressive 42 years at Nabisco, culminating in her retirement in 1996.

Her ethos is simple yet profound: "For those who have the time and the energy, we should volunteer to try to help each other."



**Office for
the Aging**

Kathy Hochul, Governor
Greg Olsen, Acting Director



Office of the State
Long Term Care
Ombudsman

2023 OMBUDSMAN OF THE YEAR



Fiona DeJardin

Fiona DeJardin is an active volunteer in Otsego County. She works tirelessly for members of the community and many organizations, including significant volunteer hours with the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. In addition to her weekly visits at facilities, she is always ready to go out to a facility when a case gets called into the office. Her compassion for the residents is always present and they look forward to her visits.

The staff is very receptive to her quiet diplomatic way of getting to the bottom of residents' concerns. She works with the resident council to educate and empower them to speak up and make a change. She works tenaciously to help residents in her facilities. The seasoned residents will tell new residents: "If you have a problem, just turn to her—she gets results."

DeJardin has lived in New York for the past 37 years, including 28 years as a professor of Art History at Hartwick College and as the Director of the Yager Museum for six years. She and her husband of 36 years live in Schenevus in a home surrounded by gardens that she tends to herself. She is a master gardener and volunteers to share her skills through Cornell Cooperative Extension. Her hobbies include lamp-work, bead making, jewelry making, ceramic hand-built objects, art, museums, reading, cats, and traveling.

DeJardin has been a volunteer for 12 years doing a lot of important work that keeps her very active. She has been an ombudsman for nine years. "My work as an ombudsman is one of the most rewarding activities of my life," she says.



Office for
the Aging

Kathy Hochul, Governor
Greg Olsen, Acting Director



2023 OMBUDSMAN OF THE YEAR

Kathleen Roe

Kathleen Roe's volunteering journey of over 50 years began during her freshman year at Michigan State University. Since then, she has continued to be involved with human services organizations, providing vital assistance to facility residents through New York's Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.



Roe is an extremely thoughtful volunteer, who considers all angles of the concerns that residents express to her, including collaboration with the regional office on relevant research of regulations. She has become adept at navigating her assigned facility, gaining knowledge of the culture of the facility and of key personnel. She supports a lively resident council, and she is forward thinking about the many challenges and aspects of providing care to long term care residents.

Roe takes every opportunity offered to further her knowledge by registering for webinars from different advocacy organizations and follows up with interesting questions and requests for further training in the areas she explores.

A native of Detroit, Michigan, Roe has lived with her husband in Troy, New York for over 40 years. She is retired from the New York State Archives where she was Director of Archives and Records Management.

"Volunteering provides interaction with people I might never have encountered otherwise and allows me to learn their stories," she says. "Connecting with their lives is enlightening, enriching, and just an important way to be a part of a community. As a volunteer, I've found that there is as much to be gained for me as to be given to others."





AWARDEE:

Norma Chapman Albany County



Norma Chapman, a member of the Albany County Elder Committee, has shown a profound commitment to her community. Recognizing the unmet needs of older adults in Albany's West Hill, she took swift action, spearheading the transformation of the Chapman Center into a welcoming congregate meal site for West Hill older adults.

Chapman's community engagement has deep roots. She is a founding figure and advisor to the Frank Chapman Memorial Institute, a non-profit organization that has diligently delivered high-quality programming to inner-city youth from Arbor Hill, West Hill, the South End, and North Albany since 1995.

Under Chapman's guidance, the Institute has offered invaluable opportunities to countless young individuals. Through initiatives like the Institute's Summer Day Camp, conducted in collaboration with the City of Albany Summer Youth Employment program, hundreds of youngsters have gained valuable employment experience. The Institute has also provided a secure haven for children, offering after-school activities, mentorship, and a platform for creative expression through performing arts and fashion shows. Chapman's instrumental role has also seen the establishment of several other after-school programs, further enhancing the support available to the youth in her community.

Chapman generously volunteers for many organizations, including the African American Festival Day, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Observance March, Black and Puerto Rican Caucus Youth Talent Showcase, Equinox, Regional Food Bank, Ronald McDonald House, African American Coalition on AIDS, and the Board of Youth Bureau of Albany County.

"Volunteers do not necessarily have the time," she says. "They just have the heart."

AWARDEE:

David Payton

Albany County



David Payton, a lifelong New Yorker, has earned acclaim for his contributions to education and community service. In 2018, he was inducted into the New York State Middle-Level Education Hall of Fame. The following year, Payton received the prestigious Joan Lipsitz Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Forum.

Throughout his life, Payton has generously given his time and expertise to various organizations. From 1985 to 2018, he served on the New York State Middle School Association's Board of Directors. His dedication extended to the New York State Essential Elements Schools-to-Watch Recognition Program, where he played a pivotal role from 2004 to 2018. He also served on the National Forum's Fidelity and Membership Committees from 2012 to 2016.

In his community, Payton has been a force for positive change. Since 2000, he has actively contributed to the Williamsburg Neighborhood Beautification Committee, enhancing the quality of life for his neighbors. His civic engagement also includes involvement with the Guilderland Democratic Committee since 2006 and the Guilderland Board of Assessment Review since 2016.

Payton also has a passion for reading, a talent for nurturing Bonsai trees, and enjoys automotive craftsmanship, exemplified by his cherished '47 Chevy.

Through his volunteer work, he has not only forged new connections but also cultivated enduring friendships.



AWARDEES:
**Dorothy &
Melvin Dye**
Allegany County

Melvin and Dorothy Dye are community stalwarts, with extensive records of volunteer service. Mel Dye has served as a board member at North Park Wesleyan Church, Wesleyan Men's Director, a District Board of Administration member, and as a board member at Allegany County Youth for Christ. He also held the position of Secretary at the Agriculture Teachers of New York. Dot's volunteer roles include collecting for the Heart & Cancer Societies, involvement in the Western New York District of Wesleyan Church Ladies Ministries, and contributions to Allegany Hope.

Currently, they continue their volunteer work with the North Park Wesleyan Church landscaping committee. Dot plays an active role in the church's welcoming, visitation, and card committees.

Their volunteerism extends to Meals on Wheels, where they've dedicated over half a century. Dot, with over 27 years of service, and Mel, with 25 years, have not only provided nutritious meals but also warm companionship to those they serve.

Dot, originally from Cuba, New York, and Mel, a South Dayton native, have called Cuba home since 1967. Celebrating 64 years of marriage, they treasure their two daughters, five grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren.

For Mel and Dot, volunteering is a cherished family tradition that brings them immense joy and fulfillment. Dot's inspiration to join Meals on Wheels stemmed from witnessing her mother's happiness when someone brought her a meal.



AWARDEE:
Raymonde Limbaugh
Brooklyn County



Raymonde Limbaugh is a dedicated volunteer who brings her unwavering commitment to the forefront every day. At the Marine Park Older Adult Center front desk, she can be found welcoming members, counting daily contributions, serving as the Advisory Board President, contributing to holiday party planning and actively participating in the grievance committee. Limbaugh plays a pivotal role as the go-to person for members, readily addressing their questions and ideas while bridging the gap between the community and staff.

Limbaugh's roots trace back to Brooklyn, where she was raised by her grandmother. A passionate Yankees fan, Limbaugh's life has been touched by the challenges of cancer, with her sister's untimely passing at 46 and her ongoing care for her own daughter who faces the same battle. Despite personal hardships, Limbaugh's unwavering dedication to the center shines through as she continues her daily volunteer work.

Limbaugh finds volunteering profoundly rewarding, boosting her self-confidence while instilling a sense of pride in giving back to the community.



AWARDEE:
Arlene Cicero
Bronx County

Arlene Cicero exemplifies unwavering dedication as a volunteer at the Bronx House Weinberg Older Adult Center for over a decade. Her daily lunch service assistance and contributions to special events showcase her deep compassion and commitment to community service.

A native New Yorker raised in the Bronx's Pelham Parkway area, Cicero graduated from Christopher Columbus High School in 1961. In 1965, she married her late husband, sharing 40 years together until his passing in 2006. Cicero held various jobs until her retirement in 2011, after which she embraced volunteer work. At Bronx House, she initiated a ping-pong club and managed the flea market. In addition to her lunch program support, Cicero has catered meals for Bronx House after-school programs.

When it comes to volunteering, Cicero emphasizes patience, courtesy, and respect, as demonstrated in her belief that one should treat others as they wish to be treated. Her commitment to community service enriches the Bronx House Older Adult Center and leaves a lasting impact on her community.



AWARDEE:
Awilda Silva
Bronx County

Awilda Silva is a dedicated volunteer with a seven-year commitment to the Bronx House Weinberg Older Adult Center. Her dedication and compassion shine through as she assists in serving lunch and contributes to special events, making her an invaluable member of the Bronx House Weinberg OAC team.

As a lifelong New Yorker, Silva's impressive career spanned 43 years as a Counselor Peer Specialist with 1199 SEIU. Holding a master's degree in human services and counseling, she is also certified in substance abuse prevention. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Silva has a passion for designing jewelry, dancing, walking, and community service.

Silva extends her kindness beyond Bronx House, dedicating her time to creating greeting cards for "Cards for Kids" and crafting liner blankets for the children of St. Jude's Cancer Center. Her commitment to helping others is truly commendable.

She emphasizes the importance of respecting others, readily assisting those in need, and giving back to the community whenever possible.

AWARDEE:

Sallie Hubbard Broome County



Sallie Hubbard has left an indelible mark on her community through her commitment to volunteerism. She has dedicated her time and energy to numerous non-profit organizations, including Special Olympics, Skills USA, Alive with Autism, Friends of Chenango Valley State Park Club, and Oak Tree. Her latest endeavor is as Secretary and Chop and Chat leader at the newly established Chenango Bridge Senior Center (CBSC).

Hubbard played a pivotal role in the launch of CBSC in April 2023, actively supporting the site supervisor in getting the center up and running. Her warm and welcoming presence has made her the “face” of the new center, attracting a growing number of participants each day. Her generosity, compassion, and patience have been instrumental in CBSC’s success, and her contributions are deeply appreciated.

Hubbard retired from the Broome-Tioga BOCES Oak Tree Program in November 2022 after 16 years of dedicated service to autistic students. Prior to that, she spent 21 years as a park ranger at Chenango Valley State Park.

Having spent most of her life in Broome County, Hubbard currently resides in Port Crane, New York, with her husband, Mark. “When volunteering, don’t settle with just one organization because there are many organizations out there that need help,” she says. “Volunteers help reconnect individuals back into their communities.”



AWARDEE:
Arden Young
Broome County

Arden Young has dedicated his life to serving others and his community, making an impact since moving to the Binghamton area. His journey in volunteerism began in 1972 when he joined the Nimmonsburg Rotary. In his spare time, he visited nursing home residents and provided transportation for those in need. After retiring from the family business, Young's passion for helping others led him to the Broome County Office for Aging's home-delivered meals program, where he marks his twenty-seventh year of service.

Young has faithfully volunteered for the same home-delivered meals route, covering thousands of miles and delivering countless nutritious meals. His visits not only provide sustenance but also a friendly check on clients, brightening their day with a few minutes of conversation.

Beyond his own service, Young instilled the values of volunteering and community service in his children, even recruiting one of his daughters to join him on his meal route. Today, she serves as the driver while Young takes on the role of the friendly visitor, creating meaningful connections with the program's participants. Young cherishes the opportunity to meet diverse individuals, both fellow volunteers and clients, whom he now considers good friends.

Born in 1929, Young's formative years were spent in Maine, a place that holds a special place in his heart. After earning an engineering degree from a Maine college, Young married his wife, Barbara, in 1959. In 1969, when he faced a layoff from Sperry Link in Long Island, his ambition led him to establish a Taylor Rental franchise in the Binghamton area. Alongside his wife and three children – Emily, David, and Nancy – he embarked on a new chapter in the community he grew to love.



AWARDEE:
Janet Stiger
Cattaraugus County

Janet Stiger brings an infectious spirit and dedication to her daily work. Her consistent dedication and tireless work ethic are nothing short of remarkable, even in “retirement.”

Stiger is a force of nature, tackling tasks with a level of industriousness that leaves others in awe, say her nominators. Her mission is simple: to spread cheer, share amusing anecdotes, and offer valuable advice to all who cross her path. Stiger’s capability, friendliness, and hidden treasure of inspiration make her an invaluable asset to those fortunate enough to know her.

Born in Sayre, Pennsylvania, in July 1948, Stiger grew up as a middle child with a twin sister, surrounded by five sisters and one brother. In 1993, she relocated to Olean to pursue her education at the Olean Business Institute and Elmira Business Institute. Her career journey began as a paralegal, where she excelled in statistics and clerical duties. However, her true passion involved advocating for clients, a passion that eventually led her to a fulfilling career with the non-profit organization Directions in Independent Living. Here, she championed the cause of people with disabilities, empowering them to lead more independent lives.

Stiger’s own life story is one of resilience and independence. She raised two daughters on her own and takes great joy in doting on her grandchildren, despite the geographical distance that now separates her from her family.

For Stiger, compassion, understanding, and unwavering devotion are the keys to making a significant difference. It’s a philosophy that keeps her connected to people, deepens her appreciation for life’s blessings, and fosters a profound sense of mutual appreciation in her interactions with others.

AWARDEE:
Hazel Todd
Cattaraugus County



Hazel Todd stands out as an exceptional volunteer, earning praise from her station manager as a true wonder. Come rain or shine, Todd takes on the most challenging home-delivered meal routes, despite numerous health concerns. Her cheerfulness and ever-present smile brighten the days of all she encounters.

In her nine years as a volunteer, Todd has become the beloved face of the county's nutrition program site, contributing to meal preparations with remarkable efficiency. She wraps silverware, sets up for lunch, and efficiently bags bread. More than her tasks, Todd embodies the role of a welcoming hostess, enlivening conversations on various topics and offering sage advice with her signature smile.

Todd's presence serves as an inspiration to her fellow center attendees. Her cherished tradition of saying grace over meals blesses her friends with her spirit, love, and dedication.

Born in London, England, during WWII to an English mother and an Army father, Todd embarked on a journey to the U.S. at age two, where she met her father in New York. The family briefly resided in Cuba, New York, before settling in Olean, New York, Todd's childhood home. In 1963, she became a naturalized citizen and built a life with her husband, whom she lovingly cared for until his passing from cancer in the early 2000s. Together, they raised three children and welcomed grandchildren and great-grandchildren into their lives.

Todd's forty-year career as a school bus driver for Head Start, an early childhood development program, left a lasting impression on the children she served. Even after all this time, some still recognize her, a testament to her enduring impact.

For Todd, volunteering holds a special place in her heart. She believes it's a wonderful way to serve the community, extending a helping hand to those in need. Beyond that, it fosters a sense of community, providing social connections that enrich her life and keep her engaged with the world around her.

AWARDEE:
Ron Jones
Cayuga County



Ron Jones is a pillar of the Aurora Fire Department, exemplifying the spirit of volunteerism for an astounding 66 years. Serving as Assistant Chief, Jones' dedication to the department remains unwavering, even in the face of medical limitations that have reduced his active involvement. He continues to attend monthly meetings and drills.

Jones' journey within the department harks back to a time when only a select few had the privilege of wearing the limited number of simple rubber jackets available. In addition to his firefighting role, Jones was among the pioneers to enroll in one of the first EMT classes offered in Cayuga County, generously volunteering as an EMT for over 40 years. He became one of the county's first Critical Care Technicians.

One rescue mission over a local waterfall inspired Jones to seek safer methods for extracting individuals from gullies and ravines. In 1984, he played a pivotal role in founding the Cayuga County High Angle Rescue Team, a group that continues to provide crucial services today. His expertise in ropes and pulley systems earned him the role of editor for a book on rope rescue, authored by one of his original instructors.

A lifelong resident of Levannah, Jones dedicated his professional career to ironworking in Syracuse. He is a proud father of nine children, with a growing legacy of 51 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. The current Aurora Fire Chief aptly describes Ron as "an all-around good guy."

Jones' philosophy on volunteering reflects his deep sense of community responsibility: "You volunteer to help your community, so someone is there to help on a person's worst day, and hopefully someone will be there to help you on your worst day."



AWARDEE:

Lili MacCormick **Cayuga County**



Lili MacCormick has dedicated her life to many volunteer endeavors, leaving an indelible mark on her community. Her service includes council and board roles with the United Ministry of Aurora, where she's also been a Sunday School Teacher and gardener. MacCormick commits her time to the Auburn Correctional Facility Alternatives to Violence Project, regularly venturing within the facility's walls. She was an early supporter of the Auburn Homeless Shelter, which began in a church basement, now known as Chapel House, where she stocked shelves and distributed food at the King Ferry Food Pantry. Additionally, MacCormick lent her expertise as a volunteer tutor with the Emily Howland Elementary School reading program and served on the Aurora Village Board.

Additionally, MacCormick volunteered with the Cornell University Botanical Gardens and is an active member of the local garden club. Her personal 40' x 40' classical labyrinth, cultivated from cuttings taken from a single boxwood plant, is a spectacular display of her horticultural pursuits. Her meticulously maintained yard boasts an array of perennial flowers and plants. In 2016, her garden was a highlight on the Southern Cayuga Garden Club tour.

Born in Germany and raised in Brunswick, Maine, MacCormick graduated from Wellesley College and eventually settled in Aurora when her husband became a professor at Wells College in 1958. Together, they raised five children. She earned a master's degree in art history just two months before the birth of her fifth child, making her the sole recipient of such a degree awarded by Wells College. She subsequently served as an art teacher in the Southern Cayuga school district from 1973 to 1997.

At the age of 92, MacCormick cherishes her connections with children and grandchildren and revels in her active and fulfilling life. Her advice to others is simple yet profound: "Just get involved in things that interest you. There are always things to do."

AWARDEE:
Russ Hyde
Chemung County



Russ Hyde has dedicated over 50 years positively impacting youth and organizations dedicated to serving young people. His exceptional energy and enthusiasm set him apart in the world of community service.

During the pandemic, as the Board President of Cornell Cooperative Extension Chemung, Hyde displayed outstanding leadership, guiding the staff through challenging times with professionalism and dedication. His mentorship of youth in facing real-life obstacles mirrors his commitment to nurturing future generations.

For Hyde, community service is a way of life, not just a passing interest. His influence on youth, their caregivers, and the organizations supporting them is profound. Over the years, he has imparted invaluable life skills, contributed to organizational development, and offered unwavering support, encouragement, and wisdom to countless individuals. Hyde's impact on the community is immense and far-reaching.

Hailing from Elmira, New York, Hyde is a true New Yorker, deeply rooted in the city's rich history. As the only child of Elmira natives Agnes and Russell Hyde, his connections to the community run deep.

With 35 years as an educator in the Elmira City School District, Hyde's career encompassed diverse roles, including as a dedicated sixth-grade teacher and superintendent. However, his role as a special education teacher stands out.

"When engaging in volunteer work," he says, "I consider it of utmost importance to connect, educate, and mentor our youth. There exists a remarkable opportunity for volunteers to contribute to children's growth and well-being by assuming the role of mentors dedicated to their betterment."



AWARDEE:

Ernestine Kyles Chemung County

Ernestine Kyles, a devoted member of the Cosmopolitan Women’s Club for forty years, has made substantial contributions to the community by providing scholarships and organizing educational workshops for students in Chemung and Steuben Counties. During her tenure, she has held key leadership roles, including President and Secretary, and spearheaded various fundraisers to support the club’s endeavors.

One of her most remarkable achievements is the establishment of the Ernestine Kyles Scholarship Awards, operating under the Cosmopolitan Women’s Club. These scholarships specifically benefit African-American students in Chemung and Steuben Counties. Over the past twenty-five years, Kyles has awarded more than fifty scholarships, totaling over \$40,000. In 2022 alone, she granted scholarships worth \$500 each to five deserving students.

By empowering young African-American students through scholarships, she has played a pivotal role in fostering educational equity in the community.

In addition to her work with the Cosmopolitan Women’s Club, Kyles currently serves as President of The ACME Benevolent Association, Inc. This organization hosts various community events, including the Black History Community Education Program, food and clothing drives, a Youth Easter Egg Hunt, and Repast gatherings for families.

Kyles, born and raised in Rayville, Louisiana, holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Southern University and a master’s degree from Michigan State University. She taught at elementary schools in Saginaw, Michigan, and Cleveland, Ohio, before relocating to Horseheads, New York. Kyle and her husband, Roy, have one son and two grandchildren.

In 1976, she joined The Corning Museum of Glass, and after twenty-five years, Kyles retired, leaving behind a legacy of commitment and accomplishments.

Kyles’ motivation for community service is simple, as she puts it: “I get pleasure from helping others. The smile on their faces, the rub from their hands, and the look in their eyes let me know how thankful they are that someone cares about them. That fills my heart with joy.”



AWARDEE:

Don LaFever

Chenango County



Don LaFever has dedicated over 25 years to volunteering for Chenango County Office for the Aging, where his unwavering commitment shines. Rain or shine, LaFever delivers meals multiple times a week, brightening the days of every client he serves.

Most of LaFever's life has been spent in New York, born right on the family farm where his mother grew up. He briefly left the state during his three-year active duty in the Army, marking 27 years of military service. He remains actively engaged with the local American Legion, having served as a post commander and continuing as a board member.

In addition to his volunteering, LaFever has a strong presence in the community. For 35 years, he has delivered a Penny Saver route. An avid canoeist, he boasts 15 first-place titles in the Canoe Regatta, along with several second and third-place finishes. Despite being in his 80s, LaFever's vitality is apparent. He firmly believes in prioritizing health and fitness: "Without your health, you have nothing."

LaFever's philosophy is simple but profound: "If you enjoy helping others, there is no better way than to get out there and do it!" He recognizes the importance of caring for older adults, acknowledging that they once cared for us as children, and now it's our turn to reciprocate their care.

AWARDEE:
Louis Thompson
Clinton County



Louis “Buzz” Thompson embarked on his journey of helping veterans a decade ago at Post 1619, where he also became a member of the Sons of the American Legion, following in his father’s footsteps as a World War II veteran.

For the past two years, Thompson has been a dedicated volunteer with the Vets Feeding Vets Program in Clinton County. In this capacity, he serves as an AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) at St. Joseph’s Community Outreach Center in Plattsburgh. Thompson’s duties include delivering food and providing companionship to homebound and isolated veterans and widows of veterans. His commitment extends further as he assists veterans from outlying areas, accompanying them to their medical appointments at the Plattsburgh VA Clinic.

Thompson’s altruism knows no bounds. He serves as an RSVP Reading Buddy, offering valuable tutoring in math to combat the “summer slump” for students. Beyond this, he has mentored a young new American from Colombia, driving him to baseball and soccer practice, and helping him purchase a bike and helmet, and providing the kind of guidance that has made the young man consider Thompson his godfather.

Hailing from Malone, New York, Thompson’s educational journey took him to Paul Smith’s College for two years before culminating in a bachelor’s degree in math from Plattsburgh State. He furthered his academic pursuits with a master’s degree in education. Thompson dedicated 32 years to teaching high school math, ultimately retiring from the Beekmantown School District. His passion for education also led him to teach various math topics at Clinton Community College, such as statistics, logic, and business calculus.

Thompson’s philosophy on volunteering is both simple and profound: it should be enjoyable. He emphasizes the importance of overlooking people’s quirks and idiosyncrasies to find joy in the act of giving. Laughter is a frequent companion in Thompson’s volunteer endeavors, and he approaches each opportunity with a sense of genuine pleasure.

AWARDEE:
Marge Laurie
Columbia County



Marge Laurie boasts an extraordinary record of volunteerism spanning over four decades, rendering her invaluable contributions to multiple organizations.

Since 1970, Laurie has devoted her time to Columbia Memorial Hospital Auxiliary. She has served in diverse roles, including positions at the information desk, patient registration, and the surgical waiting room. Additionally, she dedicates one day each week to the hospital's thrift shop, "The Second Show," where proceeds are shared between the hospital and the local youth organization, "Operation Unite." Laurie's remarkable leadership is reflected in her three separate tenures as President of the Auxiliary.

Laurie supports Daughters of the American Revolution by providing essential items such as food and toiletries to servicemen and women stationed overseas. The organization also places a strong emphasis on education and scholarship opportunities. Her affiliation with Columbia County Historical Society dates to the early 1970s, where she has lent her skills as Secretary on one occasion.

Laurie originally hails from Schenectady, New York and graduated from Draper High School. In 1968, she married James Laurie, and they settled in the Kinderhook, New York area, becoming parents to twin sons, Keith and Christopher. She now dotes on her two college-going grandchildren, Jack and Danielle.

Laurie enjoyed a fulfilling career as a legal secretary, having worked for both the State of New York and a local private practice attorney. Although she did not serve in the military herself, her late husband, James, completed a remarkable 30-year career in the U.S. Army, instilling in her a profound appreciation for service.

Laurie's rich background and past experiences have profoundly influenced her unwavering commitment to volunteerism.



AWARDEE:
Mary Young
Columbia County

Mary Young is a name inseparable from the Town of New Lebanon, where she has dedicated the past decade to supporting older adults not only within her town but in neighboring communities as well.

Young has been an active member of the Columbia County Office for the Aging Advisory Council for over three years, demonstrating her leadership by serving as Secretary for the past two years.

For several years, Young has selflessly delivered meals to residents in New Lebanon. Additionally, she serves as a dependable backup site manager at the Canaan Senior Center. Young was one of three Senior Representatives appointed during the pandemic to assist older adults with essential tasks such as grocery shopping and medical appointments.

Young is an integral member of New Lebanon Senior's Program, participating in initiatives such as collecting school supplies, gathering items for the SPCA, and distributing Christmas cards and gifts to veterans. Young also proudly serves as a member of the New Lebanon Fire Department, and she is a past member of the Lebanon Valley Ambulance (EMS).

Her compassion extends to her volunteer work every Saturday at St. Francis Church in Albany, New York. She also serves as a Vestry member at the Church of Our Savior.

Born and raised in New York State, Young is the oldest of six siblings. She has spent most of her life residing in the New Lebanon area. She's the proud mother of two children, Shawn and Michele, and cherishes her five grandchildren.

AWARDEE:

Elizabeth Pitman

Cortland County



Elizabeth “Betty Ann” Pitman embodies a life dedicated to service, both to her community and her family. With a remarkable 30-year career at Song Mountain Ski Center and the responsibility of raising six children, Pitman’s legacy of volunteerism shines brightly in her community involvement.

Pitman holds the distinction of being the first female firefighter in Cortland County. At the Preble Volunteer Fire Department she has not only served as a firefighter but has also assumed numerous leadership roles.

In addition to her firefighter role, Pitman has played an integral part in the Preble Recreation Committee. Over a span of more than a decade, she coached two girls’ softball teams and occasionally kept score for boys’ basketball. Her dedication extended to guiding young minds as a Cub Scout leader for approximately four years.

She has actively served on the Preble Town Council, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and contributed to the Cortland County and New York State Democratic Committee.

Born in Cortland, New York, Pitman has called Preble her home since 1939. Her six children are all proud residents of New York, particularly Cortland County. Her son, Bob, emphasizes that she instilled strong values and a profound sense of community service in him and his siblings.

Pitman’s life story reflects her enduring commitment to serving others and imparting the importance of community engagement to future generations.

AWARDEE:
David Johnson
Delaware County



David Johnson has made an indelible mark on his community through years of dedicated civic engagement.

Johnson's passion lies in assisting older adults who require transportation to medical appointments, an act of kindness that brings immeasurable rewards. He offers not only transportation but also companionship, often cherishing the opportunity to socialize with older adults who may otherwise spend days in isolation.

Johnson is a lifelong New Yorker. Upon retirement 25 years ago, Johnson and his wife found their home on Upper Dingle Hill Road in Andes, New York. His professional journey took an unexpected turn in the summer of 1963 when he accepted a temporary position with TWA Airlines for crew staff scheduling. What began as a short-term role transformed into a 32-year career with TWA, affording him and his family the privilege of traveling the world.

Johnson is an avid runner who has completed an astonishing 26 marathons worldwide, covering nearly 700 miles during his marathon career. Remarkably, his passion for running was sparked by a medical condition—a heart valve issue—that he managed to improve through running. Additionally, he boasts a remarkable collection of classic cars, including Ford, Porsche, Corvette, and Lincolns, and is an active member of the Catskill Mountain Classic Car Club.

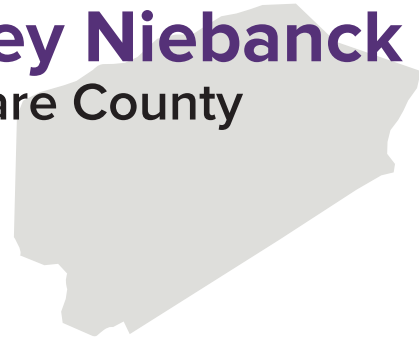
His volunteering spans various organizations, including the Andes Fire Department, where he served as an ambulance driver, treasurer, District Commissioner, and recording secretary. He also dedicated his time to the Bobcat Ski Center as a ski patroller and provided non-emergency medical transportation through the Delaware County Office for the Aging.

Johnson's message to others is clear: "Volunteering is rewarding and satisfying." He encourages everyone to explore opportunities to give back to their communities, emphasizing the impact even a single act of service can have.



AWARDEE:

Shirley Niebanck Delaware County



Shirley Niebanck is a pillar of her community and has enriched the lives of many since her arrival in Meredith in 1992. Her extensive involvement spans multiple boards, organizations, and leadership roles, demonstrating a deep commitment to the well-being of her community.

Her civic engagement extends to the local elections, where she diligently fulfills the role of an election inspector. She was named Republican of the Year in 2017 by the Delaware County Republican Committee.

Niebanck's community spirit shines during events like the Meredith Dairy Fest, where she volunteers her time, and as a representative of Meredith on the Board of Directors of Delaware Opportunities. Her involvement in the Meredith Senior Club is instrumental, and she serves as the recording secretary for the Senior Council, chairing the immensely popular pancake breakfast held annually in March. Despite her busy schedule, Niebanck finds time to nurture her flower beds and engage in the sport of pickleball twice a week.

In 1959, Niebanck embarked on a lifelong journey with her husband, Richard Niebanck, celebrating over six decades of marriage. She and her husband relocated to Delaware County in 1992 when he assumed a ministerial position with the Delhi Lutheran Church.

Niebanck acknowledges the many blessings in her life that provide her with the strength and commitment to engage in volunteer activities, viewing it as a way to express gratitude for the abundance she has received.

AWARDEE:

Virginia Haun Dutchess County



When Virginia “Ginny” Haun faced the disruption of her exercise class in the pandemic, she quickly redirected her energy toward volunteering at the Dutchess County Office for the Aging (OFA) during the height of the COVID-19 crisis. She has since remained a dedicated volunteer, committing four days a week to her work.

Haun’s roots trace back to New York, where she was born in Brooklyn and raised in Queens. At the age of 21, she married her husband, Harold, and together they raised three wonderful children. Haun held positions at Guy Carpenter Insurance Company and lent her support to her husband’s deli business. In 1974, she and Harold made Pleasant Valley, New York, their home, where she expanded her career as a registered sales assistant at Merrill Lynch.

Haun acknowledges the blessings that have come her way and feels a deep sense of gratitude. For Haun, volunteering has not only been an opportunity to serve but has also been a source of personal strength and resilience during the challenging times of the pandemic.



AWARDEE:
Juliana
Ruhland-Clarke
Dutchess County



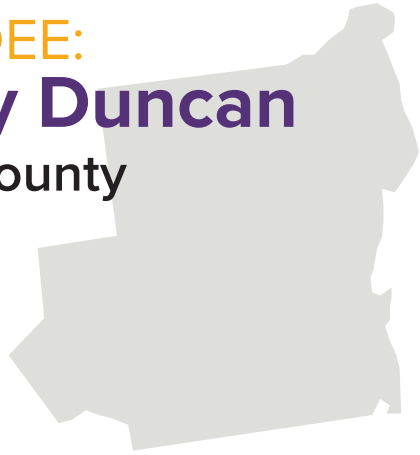
Juliana Ruhland-Clarke extends her heart and hands as a volunteer at the Dutchess County Office for the Aging’s Red Hook Friendship Center.

Ruhland-Clarke’s compassion knows no bounds as she goes the extra mile during meal deliveries, showing remarkable attention to the needs of older adults.

Ruhland-Clarke is a native New Yorker, calling Rhinebeck, New York, her home—a town she was both born and raised in. She lived in Europe for five years and her parents hailed from Germany and Switzerland. In Rhinebeck, her mother owned a dress shop, while her father operated a transportation company.

Ruhland-Clarke’s words of wisdom regarding volunteerism resonate strongly: “When searching for volunteer opportunities, conducting thorough research is key. Seek out volunteer opportunities in your local area and select the one that resonates with your heart and allows you to make the greatest positive impact.”

AWARDEE:
Nancy Duncan
Essex County



Nancy Duncan has served various organizations for 35 years. Her profound dedication to assisting those in need has been a hallmark of her life's work, whether it's offering solace to hospice patients in their homes or lending an empathetic ear to crisis calls during her past work at a helpline in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Duncan's passion for helping others has remained steadfast, even while juggling the responsibilities of two jobs to support her family. Before relocating to New York State, she dedicated numerous years to volunteering at Tulsa's St. John's Hospital. Her exceptional contributions earned her the prestigious title of Volunteer of the Year for Clinton County in 2014.

For the past 15 years, she has been a devoted volunteer at the American Red Cross-Northeastern NY Region. In her role as a Blood Donor Ambassador, she assists donors with appointments and intake, and she provides a warm reception at local blood drives. Duncan's willingness to assist extends to various tasks, including data entry, filing, friendly visits, and front desk reception. Her multifaceted support bolsters the critical services and programs accessible to North Country residents.

Born in Houston, Texas, in 1942, she moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma, with her family during fourth grade, eventually settling in Tulsa, where she raised her two children, Dr. Janet Mihuc and Brian Duncan. She is also a proud grandmother to Sarah, Josh, Devon, and Taylor. Her life has been a testament to hard work and dedication, having spent most of it working various jobs to provide for her family. Her journey into volunteering began in 1988 after her daughter Janet graduated from college.

AWARDEE:

Lora Langston
Essex County



Lora Langston is a volunteer tutor for Literacy of Clinton, Essex & Franklin Counties. She tutors at the Essex County Correctional Facility in Lewis, travels to the Port Henry Literacy office and Ticonderoga Library. She visits each place twice a month to tutor adult students. Prior to the closure of Moriah Shock Correctional Facility, Langston tutored incarcerated individuals to assist them in receiving their GED. She goes above and beyond for her students. She is a volunteer ambassador at the Westport Heritage House, ensuring that the Visitor Center remains open during the summer months. She also volunteers at the Westport Library and manages all the archives at Camp Dudley in Westport. She has spent her life volunteering with various literacy programs in Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York.

Langston was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. She attended Grove City College where she met her husband of 44 years. After receiving her master's degree in comparative literature, Langston went on to work as an editor and editorial manager at American Greetings for eight years. She and her husband then moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where she worked as a special education teacher's aide for nineteen years. She has a son, Dr. Matthew Langston, who lives in Delaware, and a two-year-old granddaughter. Langston and her husband would frequent the Westport area during the summer months as they were staff members at Camp Dudley. In 2013, they made the decision to move to upstate New York full time. She currently lives in Westport on 50 acres with a beautiful view of the forest with her husband and their pets.

“You cannot put a value on teaching individuals what they need in order to gain confidence and be successful later in life,” she says. “You aren't always sure how or if you help them in the long run, but you hope that the individualized approach will allow them to reach their goals.”



AWARDEE:

Coleen Carter **Franklin County**

Coleen Carter has dedicated herself to the Community Friendship Volunteer Program in Malone, New York, for the past few years. Carter extends a helping hand to older adults, contributing approximately 20 to 30 hours every month. Her assistance encompasses a wide range of essential tasks, from transportation and banking to running errands, grocery shopping, handling paperwork, facilitating telehealth appointments, and ensuring timely visits to healthcare providers.

Program Director Susan Schrader describes Carter as an exceptional volunteer, characterized by an unparalleled passion and compassion for those she assists.

Throughout her life, Carter has been a proud resident of New York State, residing in various locations, including Ellenburg, Burke, and her current home in Malone. Her warm and helpful nature extends to her neighbors, where she consistently goes above and beyond to provide assistance and support.

When asked for advice about volunteering, Carter's wisdom shines through: "Give it a try, as a hug from that older person is all I need for a great day!" She emphasizes that volunteering not only enriches one's life but also alleviates boredom while making individuals feel they are making the most of life's precious moments.

AWARDEES:

Mary Van Deusen

Franklin County



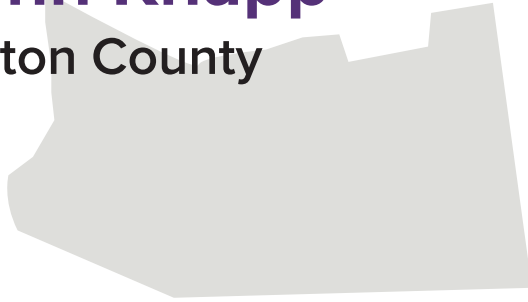
Mary Van Deusen has dedicated three years of volunteering at the Brushton-Moira Adult Center and St. Mary's Ecumenical Food Pantry. She also actively participates at the Brushton-Moira Legion Post 939, where she selflessly contributes to the kitchen operations during bingo events.

Van Deusen's roots trace back to Brushton, New York, where she spent her formative years and attended the Brushton-Moira Central School District. Her academic journey led her to SUNY Potsdam, where she majored in art and education. Her professional career began with a twelve-year tenure as a monitor and teaching assistant at F.E.H. BOCES. Subsequently, she transitioned to become a dedicated tutor within the Malone Central School District for eight years, serving as a counselor with the Franklin County Summer Youth Program.

Following a career in education, Van Deusen joined the ranks of the Franklin County Department of Social Services as an employment and training counselor, where she supported adults on temporary assistance in their journey toward employment, training, education, and SSDI. Most recently, she undertook the role of counselor at Catholic Charities' Pregnant and Parenting Program.

"Do it!" she says of volunteering, passionately emphasizing the profound rewards of service. "Volunteering is so rewarding. You don't just bring much-needed food to your community's seniors, you bring company, smiles, hugs, and love. Volunteering is bigger than yourself. You will never regret it."

AWARDEE:
John Knapp
Fulton County



Since his retirement, John Knapp serves on many boards in his community. For the last five years, he has given his guidance and support as a member of the Fulton County Office for Aging Advisory Council. He serves on the Northville Board of Education and Library Board where he provides oversight for hiring, policy and procedure and budget approvals, including construction projects. He is the Vice President for the Sacandaga Task Force and is responsible for answering all calls, setting up fundraisers and community education. He also transports people in his community to doctor appointments and takes them grocery shopping if needed. When his children were younger, he volunteered with Boy Scouts and as a soccer coach.

Knapp is a New York native and worked as a schoolteacher. During his career, he took a break from teaching and worked for IBM as software engineer. He used to spend summers in Fulton County. Once he retired, he decided to move here permanently. He and his wife just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on vacation with their family. When he is not volunteering, he enjoys spending time with his family and reading mystery novels.

“Don’t overdo it, pick a position and enjoy,” he says of the many opportunities to volunteer.



AWARDEE:
Sara Schopmeier
Fulton County



Sara Schopmeier is a seasoned volunteer with a long-standing commitment to serving her community. Her journey into volunteerism began when her children were in school, where she actively participated in the Booster Club and the PTA. Her dedication expanded as she began delivering meals during her days off. Upon retiring, Schopmeier chose to dedicate herself even more by establishing a regular meal-delivery route, maintaining consistency while readily stepping in to assist with other routes and days when needed. Schopmeier is an invaluable volunteer at her church's food pantry and actively contributes to the county's highway cleanup program.

Schopmeier's volunteer experience includes numerous organizations, such as the Fulton County Office for Aging nutrition program, Mayfield Presbyterian Church Food Pantry, Broadalbin Presbyterian Church Food Pantry, Fulton County Car Club-Highway Cleanup, and the Gloversville/Johnstown First Night Celebration.

A lifelong resident of New York, she retired in 2017 after dedicating 28 years of her career to KeyBank. She remains an active and engaged member of her community, holding the position of Elder at her church, lending her voice to the choir, and participating in the Broadalbin Senior Club. Additionally, Schopmeier takes part in various committees within the local car club and stays closely connected with her high school graduating class. Her love for spending quality time with family and friends, especially while traveling alongside her husband, Lee, is evident.

When asked for her insights on volunteering, she offers a simple yet profound piece of advice: "Keep smiling and know that you are helping others."



AWARDEE:

Patricia Elsbree Greene County

Patricia Elsbree, aged 92, is a proud native New Yorker. Her family is an essential part of her life, as her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren fill her days with love and joy.

Elsbree played a pivotal role in aiding one of her children as he recovered from a severe accident, enabling him to regain mobility and lead a functional life. Her unwavering support and determination were instrumental in this journey to recovery.

Elsbree is involved with an impressive array of committees and organizations. She serves on the Greenville Church Council, contributes her efforts to the Greenville Volunteer Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary, and offers her skills as an EMT to the Greenville Rescue Squad. Notably, Elsbree played a foundational role in establishing the Greenville Medical Center.

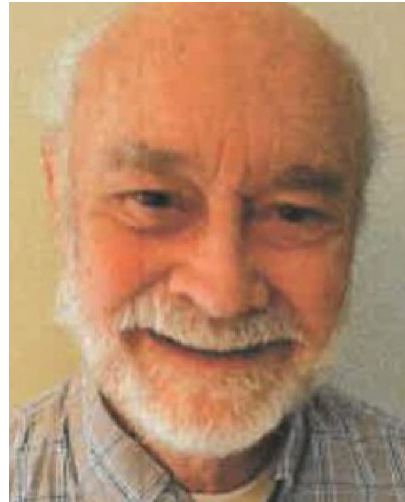
Her creative spirit shines through in her involvement with the Greenville Quilters. She also dedicates her time and energy to various youth organizations, emphasizing the importance of nurturing the younger generation. Her compassionate heart and positivity radiate as she participates in initiatives such as Greene County Home Delivered Meals, the Old Timers Dinner, and the Red Cross.

Elsbree's faith is a cornerstone of her life, reflected in her active role at the Asbury United Methodist Church. As a member of the Clematis Garden Club, her love for nature and gardening thrives.

At 92, Elsbree continues helping others, exemplifying her generation's work ethic and determination while setting a powerful example for younger generations.

Elsbree's legacy of compassion, dedication, and selflessness is encapsulated in her philosophy: "You can do what you can whenever you can."

AWARDEE:
Robert Knighton
Greene County



Robert Knighton, a Delmar, New York native and graduate of Bethlehem Central High School and Lafayette College, has led a distinguished career marked by community engagement and environmental stewardship. Retiring from the New York State workforce in 2003, he has since dedicated his energy to serving the greater good through volunteerism.

Knighton has structured and co-led pivotal community meetings aimed at gauging citizen aspirations for the future of their town. He secured grant funding for the development of a comprehensive natural resources inventory for his county. Knighton has further contributed to his community's well-being by creating four preserves designed for communal enjoyment, thereby enhancing the quality of life for residents.

In addition to his professional endeavors, Knighton has served as both President and Treasurer of the New Baltimore Conservancy and as President of the Greene Land Trust.

With 36 years of marriage to his wife, Lynda, Knighton finds joy in his personal life. His passion for travel has taken him to every state in the U.S., except Hawaii.



AWARDEE:
Kathy Bird
Hamilton County



Kathy Bird, a resident of Indian Lake for seven decades, has positively impacted her community through her commitment to service and community engagement. She lovingly raised her two daughters in this tight-knit town, embodying the values of compassion and community spirit.

During her daughters' formative years, Bird selflessly participated in Girl Scouts, extending a helping hand whenever needed. For multiple years, she ensured the safety of school children as the school crossing guard and even donned Santa Claus attire during Christmas, delighting children with candy canes and spreading joy.

Her compassionate care made a lasting impact during a 15-year tenure helping at a two-person home for the developmentally disabled.

A cornerstone of Indian Lake's civic life, Bird actively participates in numerous town activities and organizations, including veterans programs and the Reuse Recycle Building, which she helped revive post-pandemic through a petition campaign.

She is also responsible for crafting the original Ollie the Otter mascot for the Indian Lake Winter Carnival, adding an element of fun to the festivities.

Bird's profound dedication to community projects is a testament to her caring and compassionate personality. "If you want to keep your community glued together, volunteering is a must," she says.

AWARDEE:

Barbara Van Slyke

Hamilton County

Photo not provided

Barbara Van Slyke is a tireless and cherished pillar of the Wells, New York community. Her commitment to service spans a wide array of organizations.

As a dedicated member of the Wells Volunteer Ambulance Corp, Van Slyke sorts cans and bottles, sells raffle tickets, and actively participates in regular meetings.

For the past 18 years, she has been an integral part of the Wells Garden Club, where she even assumed the role of president for one year. Van Slyke's enthusiasm shines through her contributions, from working on floats for "Old Home Days" to managing the community garden and assisting in growing produce for the food pantry.

During the summer months, she graciously guides visitors through local history as a member of the Wells Historical Society. Her contributions extend to baking pies, knitting hats for newborns at Nathan Littauer Hospital, and aiding in exhibit setups.

Van Slyke's commitment to altruism includes regular blood donations to the American Red Cross since 2003 and five years of service on the Hamilton County Cooperative Extension Board.

A devout church elder at Johnstown Reform Church, Van Slyke actively participates in the choir, assists with church dinners, and estimates her involvement in over 600 such events since joining.

She has been delivering meals to homebound seniors for the Warren/Hamilton Counties Office for the Aging for the past 15 years and volunteers as needed for the monthly chicken and biscuit dinners at Wells United Methodist Church.

Van Slyke encourages older adults to embrace volunteering, noting how much communities rely on their contributions.



AWARDEE:

Michael Bulger Herkimer County



Mike Bulger, a lifelong New Yorker, has left an indelible mark on the Little Falls community. For many years, from May to August, he has been the driving force behind Cruise Inn By Mike, a cherished Thursday night tradition and fundraiser at the Little Falls Marina. This signature event brings together antique car enthusiasts from across the region, who gather along the waterfront to showcase their prized vehicles. Bulger dutifully coordinates the event, including awards, food trucks, activities, and social media updates.

A highlight of the Cruise Inn season is the grand finale—a spectacular fireworks display over the marina, orchestrated by Bulger through months of diligent fundraising efforts.

Notably, the 50/50 raffles held during Cruise Inn With Mike each week generates funds to support ICAN's annual Shop With A Cop event in collaboration with the City of Little Falls Police Department and the Little Falls Fire Department. Thanks to his generosity, children have the opportunity to shop for Christmas gifts alongside law enforcement officers, benefiting countless deserving families in the community.

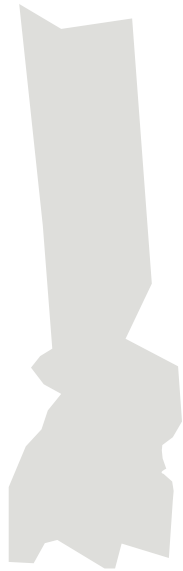
During the holiday season, Bulger also provides hot meals to older adults who may otherwise spend the occasions alone, spreading cheer, companionship and extraordinary kindness.

His dedication to community knows no bounds, and he exemplifies hometown pride through many selfless acts.

A small-business owner, auto mechanic, and longtime employee of a local lumber yard, Bulger shares his life with a loving partner. Together they have two children and two grandchildren.

AWARDEE:

**Joan & Roy
Van Slyke**
Herkimer County



Joan and Roy Van Slyke are a dedicated volunteer duo hailing from Little Falls, New York who have made a positive impact on their community. Together, their exceptional service merits special recognition.

Joan, a volunteer with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) since 2000, began preparing food for the home-delivered meals program in 2001. Since 2004, she has been a stalwart dispatcher for the Retired Individuals Driving Elderly (RIDE) program and is now distinguished as the program's longest-serving volunteer, with an impressive 19 years of dedicated service, amounting to over 3,415 donated hours.

Roy, also an RSVP volunteer, joined the cause in 2009, focusing his efforts as a RIDE driver. Over the years, he has traversed thousands of miles and contributed more than 2,676 hours to the program. Prior to his RSVP involvement, Roy generously devoted his time to the Habitat for Humanity program.

Joan and Roy Van Slyke reside in Little Falls, with Roy being a lifelong resident and Joan calling it home for the past 67 years. Their love story began when Roy returned from the Korean War, leading to a heartfelt union and a life rooted in service to their community. Roy had a career as an electrical engineer with General Electric. Joan worked for more than two decades in retail. Together, they have six children, 13 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

In the words of Roy, "Once you start volunteering, you won't be able to stop." Joan succinctly encourages others to join the cause with her motto: "Just Do it." Their collective dedication to improving the lives of others stands as a testament to their character and enduring love for their community.



AWARDEE:

Sheila Barney-Pullus

Jefferson County

Sheila Barney-Pullus is a dedicated volunteer with a remarkable track record of over 50 years of service. Her involvement spans a wide range of causes, demonstrating her commitment to making a positive impact on her community.

Barney-Pullus' volunteer journey began with movements like Save the River, an advocacy organization led by prominent figures Abbie Hoffman and Johanna Lawrenson, where she actively contributed to grassroots efforts alongside 500 dedicated citizens. She also played a pivotal role in the Academic/Economic Cross Border Internship Global Network Project, fostering connections between Watertown in New York, Kingston, Ontario, and Japan's Ashinaga Initiative.

Barney-Pullus has served as the Jefferson County legislative chairperson, dedicating her time to critical community initiatives such as the construction of a therapy pool at the Ft. Drum Army Installation. The pool is specifically designed to support wounded warriors. Her exemplary service earned her the Commander's Award Medal for public service.

In her role on the Advisory Council for the Jefferson County Office for the Aging, she has served as Vice President/Interim Council President. Additionally, she became one of the first volunteers trained for the "Respite Haven" Adult Day Care Program in 2021.

Barney-Pullus' fundraising efforts have significantly contributed to the Steeple Restoration Project at the historic First Baptist Church in Watertown. Furthermore, her support for the children's Music Lending Library has ensured that Watertown School District students have access to musical instruments from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

A native of Watertown, Barney-Pullus graduated from Watertown High and pursued a major in business at Jefferson Community College. Her professional career began in retail, but her passion for volunteering led her to champion various causes, including veterans' rights, Mercy Hospital's Day Care Center, and the Alzheimer's Association.

Barney-Pullus' commitment to volunteerism is deeply rooted in a family tradition of service. She is inspired by relatives who served in World War II, her aunt Nancy Cooke's groundbreaking work alongside Eleanor Roosevelt, and her great-great uncle J.B. Wise, who was Mayor of Watertown in 1895 and played a pivotal role in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Her enduring advice to all is simple yet profound: "Give Your Word, Keep Your Word."



AWARDEE: **Modesto Dia** Kings County

Modesto Dia is an inspiring individual whose passion, talent, and kindness have made a significant impact on the Swinging Sixties Older Adult Center and the Williamsburg community. A dedicated volunteer since 2016, he has consistently invested time and energy in many activities, notably tending to the center's gardens. Dia's multifaceted talents include gardening, artistic flair as a painter, and a captivating singing voice that adds a vibrant touch to every event. His exceptional leadership qualities shine as President of the Parkview Terrace Home Association, where he fosters a strong sense of community.

Dia's commitment to community extends far beyond the older adult center, taking pride in the betterment of Williamsburg as a community. From being an educator in the Philippines to a devoted science teacher and tennis coach in New York City, he has shown profound commitment to education and mentorship.

Born in the Philippines in 1936, Dia embarked on a new chapter in 1986 when he and his wife, a retired RN and former President of the Philippine Nurses Association, moved to the U.S. His professional trajectory included teaching stints in the Philippines and Nigeria before dedicating 14 years to teaching science and two decades to coaching tennis in New York City.

His enduring contributions have shaped the Swinging Sixties Older Adult Center and the Williamsburg community at large. He stands as a genuine role model and an invaluable asset to any program fortunate enough to have him as a volunteer.

Dia aptly summarizes his philosophy: "Volunteers are the backbone of the community; they're the ones who make things possible. I would advise anyone, especially retirees, to volunteer their time—it adds fulfillment to your life."

AWARDEE:

James & Christine Chafty

Lewis County



James and Christine Chafty go above and beyond to help people in their community, especially older adults who may not have any family or support. They volunteer for seven different organizations between the two of them, including the food pantry, St. Martin’s Church, Salvation Army Red Kettle, Lyons Falls ALIVE, fundraising dinners at St. John’s Catholic Church, and Knights of Columbus.

Jim is from Germany and has lived all over the country, as his father was in the military. His family moved to Port Leyden, New York. Christine has lived on a dairy farm outside of Lyons Falls, New York her entire life. Jim and Christine both attended South Lewis School. Jim went to college after graduating and Christine worked at the school for countless years. The couple has been married for 22 years.

“Volunteering is very rewarding, and it keeps you busy, young and active,” they say.



AWARDEE:

Joan Mitchell **Livingston County**



Joan Mitchell is a passionate and dedicated volunteer who finds joy in contributing to many charitable causes. Her journey of service has included various roles, from driving older adults to doctor's appointments to serving as a friendly caller.

On the Office for the Aging Advisory Council, she not only actively participates but also shares valuable insights and information with her community. A true ambassador, Mitchell disseminates knowledge acquired from council meetings and diligently brings forth questions and innovative ideas for the committee's consideration.

Mitchell's active community involvement includes her church, where she serves as a deacon, the Caledonia Seniors Club, and the Focus on the Children organization. She is also among the most active members of the Livingston County Suicide Prevention Task Force, where she has played a vital role in community engagement, breaking down stigma, and organizing impactful events.

Having spent nearly her entire life in New York State, primarily in Livingston County, Mitchell's passion for volunteering was instilled at an early age from her parents. Her philanthropic journey emerged from personal tragedy, as she became involved with Mothers of Donors after the loss of her youngest son due to a cardiac problem. Her advocacy for organ donation has touched numerous lives.

Mitchell's impressive career at Strong Memorial Hospital spanned nearly five decades, rising from a cashier to a patients account manager overseeing a substantial workforce. In her personal life, she cherishes time spent with her children and grandchildren, enjoys reading, genealogy research, and music. She maintains close-knit friendships and has delved deeply into her family's rich history.



AWARDEE:
Viola Ducatte
Madison County



Viola Ducatte is a steadfast and reliable volunteer, known for work assisting individuals with transportation needs, even during the challenging times brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Her work persisted through the program's transition to the Volunteer Transportation Center and subsequently to the Madison County Rural Health Council's GO Madison program.

Ducatte's roots are in Vernon, New York, where her father served as a minister at South Bay Chapel, providing a solid foundation for a lifetime of community service. Graduating from Vernon-Verona-Sherill in 1965, she furthered her skills by training as a nurse's aide at Murphy Memorial Hospital in Rome, New York. After briefly relocating following her second marriage in 1969, Ducatte returned to the area in 1972, where she embarked on a career at Oneida Hospital that spanned many years.

Following her husband's passing in 2013, Ducatte moved in with her mother in Clockville, New York, forming a loving and mutually supportive bond. After her mother's passing, she moved to Stoneleigh Apartments, where she actively participates in a Bible study group and finds enjoyment playing bingo and other pastimes.

Ducatte's greatest joy lies in connecting with diverse individuals and assisting them in reaching their crucial doctor's appointments. Her dedication to making a positive impact on people's lives shines through her selfless service and unwavering commitment to the well-being of her community.

AWARDEE:

Ronald Smith **Madison County**



Ronald Smith is a dedicated individual whose contributions to Madison County and his community are both varied and impactful. His responsibilities include overseeing the assembly, labeling, and organization of the bi-monthly Office for the Aging newsletter, distributed to over 4,000 county residents.

Additionally, he has served as president and vice president of the Oneida Pop Warner for two years each, actively managing its concession stand to support the organization.

As a military veteran, Smith played a crucial role during the Middle East Crisis in 1970 while serving in the Navy. In the Navy Reserves, he volunteered for various support trainings, including drills related to nuclear disaster preparedness.

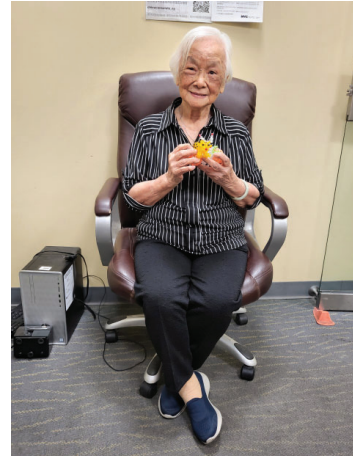
Smith was born and raised in Oneida, New York as the second of two children. His family owned and operated a local bakery in the Durhamville/Oneida area. He met his wife, Bonnie Rickard, and together they have built a life that has taken them from Vernon Center to Stockbridge before settling in Oneida. During his time in the Navy, they were stationed in Norfolk, Virginia.

Professionally, Smith was a supervisor at ESCO (formerly Gray-Syracuse), a company specializing in manufacturing parts for aircraft, cars, and military contracts.

Ron and Bonnie's family expanded through adoption, with their son Scott and Korean daughter Heather becoming cherished additions. Family remains central in Smith's life while he actively supports his grandchildren by attending their sporting events and providing unwavering encouragement.

He sums up his motivation for service simply: "It feels good to give back."

AWARDEE:
Bi Lian Deng
Manhattan County



At 97 years old, Zhang Deng, also known as Bi Lian, has devoted decades of her life to serving the Open Door Senior Center. A Taishan, China native, Bi Lian immigrated to the U.S. in 1986 and promptly immersed herself in a life of service.

Bi Lian has spent years providing valuable health care services to the center's members, including weekly blood pressure checks and health lectures. Her lectures on critical topics like cholesterol, diabetes, and blood pressure have been a lifeline for the Chinese community, where such resources are in high demand yet short supply.

Bi Lian generously shares her culinary expertise, not only offering nutritional guidance but also earning awards in cooking competitions. Her talents go beyond health care and cuisine, as she is proficient in various dance forms. She even graced the stage at Lincoln Center during the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC) Open Door 40th Anniversary event. Additionally, she and her husband are Tai Chi masters, embodying a profound understanding of holistic health preservation.

She expresses deep gratitude to NYC Aging for providing the invaluable platform of the Open Door Senior Center, enabling her to make a profound impact on the community and touch the lives of countless individuals.



AWARDEE:
Gloria Ross
Manhattan County

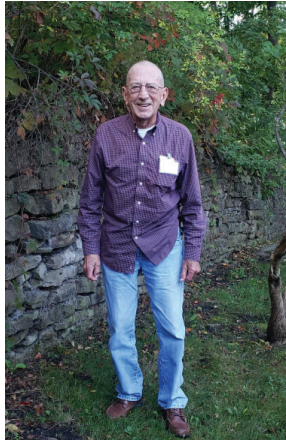


Gloria A. Ross has been an esteemed member of Encore Community Services since its inception in 1977, when it was situated at St. Malachy’s Church. Her commitment to her community dates back to her association with the church, where she worked closely with Father George Moore. Her contributions ranged from distributing meals to volunteering during Thanksgiving and addressing any other needs within her community.

Ross’ dedication has not gone unnoticed, as she has been featured in documentaries, sat with past mayors, and earned plaques in recognition of her invaluable assistance to Encore and St. Malachy’s. Remarkably, after 45 years, she continues to serve as the Director of Ministries at St. Malachy’s.

Originally hailing from Jamaica, Ross made her way to New York City in the 1960s. Drawing on her extensive corporate real estate experience in Jamaica, she decided to apply her expertise to benefit her new community in the U.S. She proudly speaks of her nephews who have followed in her footsteps by serving in the military.

In Ross’ words, “If you’re sincere, then you’ll enjoy being able to help. As seniors, we should not be left behind. Understand that volunteering is important and needed.”



AWARDEE:

Richard Cotten **Monroe County**

Richard Cotten's journey at the Ogden Senior Center began as a volunteer, but his contributions have grown far beyond that initial role.

As a volunteer, Cotten assists in setting up lunch trays, ensuring that those with mobility challenges receive their meals, and he takes responsibility for maintaining well-stocked bathrooms. He brings joy to members of the center by providing sweet treats twice a week. He warmly welcomes new older adults to the center, fostering an inclusive and inviting atmosphere with a keen ability to discern people's needs.

Born in New York, Cotten has spent a total of sixty-two years in the state. He briefly resided in Florida for 18 years but returned home to be closer to family. His family connections are a source of pride, with his father serving as an administrator at Jamestown Public School in Jamestown, New York, and his brother achieving the rank of Sergeant in the Jamestown Police Department. Interestingly, their voices were so similar that dispatchers occasionally couldn't distinguish between them.

Cotten stresses the importance of active listening and fostering respect, care, and kindness in one's interactions with others.

AWARDEE:
Dee Wake
Monroe County



Dee Wake, an enthusiastic presence at her senior center, has a profound love for community engagement and staying active. Her commitment to keeping others informed is evident through her meticulously maintained binder containing newsletters and monthly menus, serving as a valuable resource for both newcomers and all visitors to the center.

Currently, Wake holds pivotal roles as a member of the senior center's Site Council and the Project Council for the Monroe County Office for the Aging. Additionally, her active involvement extends to orchestrating weekly Tuesday Bingo sessions.

Wake's roots in Hilton, New York, where she was born and raised, are complemented by her passion for genealogy and ancestry research. She takes pride in the care of her family's gravesites at the local cemetery.

In her leisure time, Wake finds joy in horses and indulging in crafting pursuits, such as ceramics and quilting. She relishes day trips exploring new destinations.

If one were to ask Wake for advice, she would likely emphasize the importance of seeking out opportunities for staying active and socially engaged, as demonstrated by her vibrant and fulfilling lifestyle.



AWARDEE:

John Gaston Montgomery County



John Gaston has been an integral part of the Office for the Aging Senior Transport volunteer driver program since its inception, providing assistance to older adults who require transportation to medical appointments. In the program's fifth year, he continues to volunteer tirelessly, dedicating an average of 12 hours each week driving to essential medical visits. His reliability makes him a cornerstone of the program, and his willingness to go above and beyond has led to the development of deep friendships with many of his clients.

A lifelong resident of Amsterdam, New York, Gaston holds a degree in English literature and classical languages from Lehigh University. His proud service in the U.S. Army culminated in the rank of Captain. Throughout his career in human services, including 24 years as an addictions counselor at St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam, he demonstrated a strong commitment to helping others.

Upon retirement, Gaston sought a new avenue for personal fulfillment and discovered volunteering. He recognized that it not only allowed him to assist those in need but also provided a profound sense of purpose and an opportunity to give back to his community.

"Volunteering is rewarding work," he says. "I have made many wonderful friends among the clients I serve and enjoy the time spent and the conversations we have in our travels together."



AWARDEE:

Clementine Bianco

Nassau County



Clementine Bianco, an 88-year-old resident of Bethpage for over six decades, embodies the spirit of volunteerism and community engagement. Her extensive list of volunteer endeavors is a testament to her unwavering commitment to serving others.

For 34 years, she has been a devoted volunteer at Nassau University Medical Center, consistently contributing her time and energy to support their mission. Additionally, she has dedicated five years of service to St. Martin's Pantry, where she not only donates essential items but also extends her helping hand to those in need. She also has served roles as a Girl Scout and Cub Scout leader, President of Nassau County 4H, a Sunday School teacher, and a remarkable tenure as Director and President of the Bethpage Senior Citizen's group for five years. Her selfless dedication ensured the continued operation of Bethpage Seniors.

Married for 67 years, Bianco is a proud mother of two children, both of whom have earned master's degrees. She also revels in the joys of being a grandmother to five grandchildren. Notably, she co-owned and operated a deli with her family for 15 years, reflecting her strong work ethic and connection to community.

AWARDEE:

Angelo Caputo
Nassau County



Angelo Caputo has generously devoted his time and expertise to a variety of organizations, leaving a lasting imprint on the community he holds dear.

His volunteer journey has taken him on numerous paths, including serving as a Pre Cana Teacher for Holy Name of Mary Church, coaching Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) soccer and baseball for Valley Stream, and contributing to the Knights of Columbus. He is also active in the Long Island Society of Italian Americans (LISIA), where he continues to make a difference as the Anti-Defamation Chairman.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Caputo has called Valley Stream his home for half a century. He served his country in the U.S. Army from 1966 to 1970. Upon returning, he pursued higher education, earning a master's degree in business administration from Pace University. His professional journey included positions at Deutsche Bank, National Westminster Bank, and Israel Discount Bank.

In 1971, Caputo married his best friend, Cathy, and together they have raised three children and been blessed with five grandchildren. His active involvement in his church reflects his deep connection to his faith and his desire to support others in their journeys.

AWARDEE:

Dale Henry

Niagara County



Dale Henry's commitment to helping others and his active involvement in the Tuscarora Nation are a testament to his selflessness and dedication to his community. As a member of the White Bear Clan, he has tirelessly contributed to various initiatives and organizations, leaving a lasting impact on those he serves.

During his career at the New York Power Authority, he earned the title of Volunteer of the Year twice. In 1999, he received the prestigious honor of being named Iroquois Native American of the Year, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to his heritage and community.

Henry's involvement in the Tuscarora Temperance Society includes participating in roadside and cemetery cleanup efforts on the Reservation, hosting the Nation picnic, and supporting veterans within the community. He maintains the community gymnasium, ensuring that both children and adults on the Reservation have access to the facility, and he provides transportation assistance to those in need. He also volunteers for the men's lacrosse team and organizes the annual Memorial Yahtzee and Crokinole tournaments, which draw participants from across the United States and Canada.

Twice a year, Henry expresses his gratitude to the Nation House staff by preparing breakfast for them, recognizing their hard work and dedication. His diverse and extensive volunteer efforts have made him a central figure in the community, earning him the admiration and respect of Niagara County.

Born in Niagara Falls on June 2, 1963, Henry is the youngest of five brothers. He has been a lifelong resident of Western New York, attending the Tuscarora Indian School and graduating from Niagara Wheatfield High School in 1981. He furthered his education at Niagara County Community College, earning a degree in humanities/liberal arts. After nine years in the public relations field, he embarked on a fulfilling career with the New York Power Authority.

Henry's guiding philosophy is simple yet profound: "Just do it – volunteering makes you feel good."

AWARDEE:
Laura Hand
Onondaga County



Laura Hand has long advocated for the Onondaga County Office for the Aging, shedding light on the office's invaluable work. As a respected local celebrity, she retired in 2019 following a remarkable 50-year broadcasting career, with 47 of those years spent at NBC3 and CBS5 in Syracuse, New York.

Throughout her career, Hand achieved several significant milestones, including being the first woman news director at Syracuse University's College Radio and the first woman reporter at Channel 3. As a community relations director, she actively engaged in career fairs and community outreach initiatives, forging connections between the Central New York audience and local resources and individuals. Her reporting delved into critical issues such as domestic violence, mental health, grief and loss, gambling addiction, and fire safety, providing a platform for locals to share their stories and efforts. She interviewed many notable figures like former First Lady Nancy Reagan and former New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, earning her numerous awards and accolades.

Following retirement, Hand embarked on a second career, partnering with her Pomeranian therapy dog, Moose. Together, they brought joy and comfort to people of all ages, from preschoolers in libraries to seniors in independent living and long-term care facilities. Her community involvement extended to her neighborhood association, where she maintained several gardens, as well as local community groups like PAWS of CNY and Oasis Senior Education Program, where she served on the Advisory Council for five years.

In her words: "I knew the important issues because I was in touch with the community." Hand's legacy is one of communication, problem-solving, and a profound commitment to building a vibrant Central New York community for all.



AWARDEE:

Manuel Martinez

Onondaga County



Manuel “Manny” M. Martinez, a dedicated advocate for senior veterans within the Onondaga County Veterans Service Agency, leads a remarkable life marked by military service, education, and extensive community involvement.

Born in 1921, Martinez enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 while in his third year at Syracuse University. His military journey in World War II earned him prestigious honors, including the Combat Infantry Badge, two Bronze Stars, and a Purple Heart, highlighting his valor and dedication to his country.

Following his military service, Martinez pursued education and earned a master’s degree in health education from Syracuse University. He later embarked on a distinguished 34-year career within the Genesee School District, serving as a physical education teacher for 25 years. As a coach in baseball, soccer, and basketball, he imparted valuable skills to countless students. Additionally, he contributed nine years as an assistant principal before his retirement in 1984.

Martinez has been an active member of the New York State Retired Teachers Association, Disabled American Veterans Chapter 30, Solvay Fire Department, and a dedicated 50-year member of the Solvay Tigers Athletic Club, where he currently serves on the board of directors and was formerly the club’s president.

Moreover, Martinez committed 33 years to public service, holding roles as Solvay’s Village Trustee, Town of Geddes Councilman, Town Supervisor, and an analyst for the Syracuse Onondaga County Youth Bureau.

Martinez’ life epitomizes service and dedication, both in his military contributions and extensive community involvement.

AWARDEE:
Mina Drake
Ontario County



Mina Drake earned a prestigious honor in 2019 for amassing 5,000 volunteer hours at the local hospital. Drake continues to rack hours, lending her time to the hospital's Guild Gallery Gift Shop. Drake has served on the Guild board for over 11 years, where she invested substantial hours organizing events such as bake sales, the annual Tree of Lights Ceremony, Foodlink distributions, and the highly anticipated annual Better Than Black Friday sale.

When asked about her motivation for volunteering, Drake simply states: "It's my purpose in life."

Before becoming a volunteer, Drake owned and operated a thriving custom leather business in Naples, New York, for several years, specializing in crafting and repairing various leather items.

Her decision to transition into volunteer work came following her relocation to Canandaigua from Naples, New York, a move prompted by the passing of her husband in 2000. In 2018, she beat her battle against cancer, a triumph she attributes to the exceptional team that contributed to her recovery, reaffirming her commitment to give back to her community.

Drake derives immense joy from both living in and serving her community and fellow neighbors in Ontario County.



AWARDEE:
**Mike & Nancy
Parsons**
Ontario County



Nancy and Mike Parsons have been devoted volunteers in Ontario County since 1985, consistently demonstrating their dedication to the well-being of their community as active members of the First Congregational Church of Canandaigua.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic spurred Mike into action as he organized a ride-sharing network for congregation members. This initiative helped deliver or arrange groceries, medications, vaccination appointments, and even socially distanced porch visits. The couple also upheld the cherished tradition of distributing yellow roses to mothers on Mother’s Day, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. These ride connections evolved into the “Caring Callers” program, spearheaded by Nancy, which sought to combat social isolation by fostering connections through regular phone calls.

Most recently, Nancy and Mike assumed leadership roles in the extensive restoration of their church’s historic 1812 sanctuary. When a piece of plaster fell from the ceiling, they swiftly took charge. Leading the restoration committee, they secured grants, collaborated with contractors, conducted daily site visits, coordinated volunteers, and worked with the media to publicize the Restoration Celebration marking the project’s completion.

Originally hailing from Ohio, Mike and Nancy relocated to Canandaigua, New York, in 1985. Mike’s community work benefits from his expertise in construction and building materials, while Nancy’s background is in museum education. The couple has three children and four grandchildren.

“There are numerous intriguing options and activities that are in need of volunteers,” they remark. “Just look around and find what fits you!”

AWARDEE:
Karl Heller
Orange County



When the Maybrook VFW found itself facing financial constraints in its pursuit of property to relocate, Jake Barletta and Karl Heller stepped forward, pledging their own homes as collateral to secure the necessary financing. Although the mortgage has since been fully paid off, their willingness to place their homes at risk for the sake of the VFW's mission underscores their commitment to community.

Heller contributes regularly to the VFW's activities. He served as a member of the VFW Honor Guard, participating in funerals and parades, where he played Taps to honor fallen comrades. He continues to volunteer as a DJ for various VFW functions. He is also a life member of the Maybrook Fire Department, where he once served as Chief and held the position of Captain of the Fire Police until recently stepping down due to vision problems. His volunteer efforts in Maybrook earned him the esteemed Dineen Award in 2016, recognizing his exceptional service to the community.

Born and raised in Maybrook, New York, Heller is one of twelve siblings. Despite leaving high school at the age of 16 to assist his brothers and sisters, he went on to join the Army, dedicating six years to service during the Korean War. Following his honorable discharge in 1952, he returned to Maybrook and began his career with the NY/New Haven/Hartford Railroad, where he eventually retired. He married Irma, and together they raised three children: Joann, Karl, and Iris. Karl and Irma celebrated 46 years of marriage before her passing. He has been blessed with seven grandchildren and seventeen great-grandchildren.

For Heller, the joy of volunteering is rooted in his love for people and his desire to stay engaged and make a difference in the community.



AWARDEE:
**Carol & Stan
Spencer**
Orange County

Since 2010, Carol and Stan Spencer have been volunteers for the Home Delivered Meal Program. They have been instrumental in mentoring and training numerous new meal delivery recruits, ensuring the program's continuity and success. In 2020, they also joined the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), extending their reach and impact.

Even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Carol and Stan refused to be deterred, stepping up to assist with the delivery of essential grocery bags through the Veterans Food Pantry.

Stan played a pivotal role in the development of the Education Center and 4-H Park in Otisville, collaborating with Cornell Cooperative Extension. This initiative addressed the need for expanded educational programs and experiences in their rural community. In recognition of his significant contributions, the entrance drive to the center was officially named Stan Spencer Way.

In addition to their volunteer efforts, Stan showcases his woodworking talents by crafting thoughtful gifts for all the clients on their delivery route, such as wooden boxes filled with fresh fruit and small cutting boards. Throughout the years, he generously created and donated woodworking projects to older adults, staff members, and awardees. Stan also dedicated his time to the 4-H Youth Development Program, introducing woodworking projects to inspire and engage the youth.

Originally hailing from Wisconsin, Carol worked as an executive assistant, while Stan pursued a career as an engineer at FLUID Engineering, specializing in reverse osmosis water purification. They later relocated to New York, where they now reside in Slate Hill. The Spencers have one son, Gregory, who serves as the CEO of Crystal Run Healthcare. Gregory's wife, Deborah, is an OB/GYN with Crystal Run. They have four grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

"We've been so blessed in our lives, and we'd like to share our blessings with others," they say. "When you volunteer, you get a lot more from the experience than even those you are helping. We have a lot of fun seeing our people when we volunteer."

AWARDEE:

Barbara Filipiak Orleans County



Barbara Filipiak is a dedicated volunteer who devotes countless hours to various organizations. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, she volunteered for the Orleans Genesee County Public Health Department, providing vital assistance with essential supplies. She worked at every vaccination clinic, and her exceptional efficiency and organizational skills made her the first to step up when help was needed.

Her volunteer work also includes the Medina Area Association of Churches (MAC Thrift Store and Emergency Food Pantry). She also takes on numerous volunteer responsibilities within Medina Holy Trinity Parish and holds several officer roles within the Catholic Daughters organization. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Medina Historical Society and is an active member of the Cobblestone Society, Sandstone Society, and the Friends of the Lee Whedon Memorial Library. At the local Alpha Theta Chapter of the Woman's Educator Society, she has held positions such as president, treasurer, and rules committee member over the years, making a significant impact both locally and at the state level.

Born in Eden, New York, she is the oldest of six siblings. She attended Immaculate Academy in Hamburg, New York, followed by D'Youville College in Buffalo, and she completed her education at SUNY Brockport. She embarked on her teaching career in Medina, New York, in September 1972, dedicating herself to educating third and fourth graders for 33 years before retiring in June 2005. She currently resides in Medina.

AWARDEE:
John Lyons
Oswego County



John Lyons is an exemplary volunteer with a remarkable track record spanning well over two decades. His selfless dedication to helping others – in particular, with his tax knowledge – is truly commendable.

Lyons consistently goes above and beyond to assist not only his friends and family, but he also extends his expertise to co-workers and others in need. Whenever challenges arise during the tax preparation process, Lyons is the first to offer his assistance. He frequently commits his time to the Human Concerns Center and also volunteers at the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) AARP Tax Aide Program.

He and his wife, Jen, recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a trip to Wyoming in July of this year. Together, they have five children and two grandchildren.

Lyons said he's had the privilege of working alongside and getting to know some very dedicated members of the community. Volunteering, he says, connects him with the richness of those relationships. He encourages everyone to engage wherever they can for the common good.

AWARDEE:

Loretta Mosher **Otsego County**



Loretta “Nan” Mosher is always ready and willing to lend a helping hand to those in need. Her volunteer work through her church has had a profound impact on numerous individuals and families. Mosher’s compassionate nature extends to making prayer shawls for those she may not even know personally but has learned could benefit from one. She expresses her gratitude and offers words of encouragement through thoughtful notes to others, exemplifying her caring and supportive character.

Her roots trace back to Little Falls, New York. In 1963, she married her husband, Clark, while he was in the military, and they lived in El Paso, Texas, where their first daughter was born in 1965. The couple had two more children and eventually settled in the Central Square school district, where all their children graduated. Following in her mother’s footsteps, she pursued a career in teaching, specializing in preschool education.

Recently, she faced her most significant challenge when her husband suffered a stroke, leaving his left side paralyzed. She has been by his side, providing unwavering support as he works toward recovery. Her dedication and grace in navigating this difficult situation reflect her deep love and kindness. She is not only her husband’s biggest advocate but also his most enthusiastic cheerleader as he makes strides in his rehabilitation.

Mosher’s valuable advice to others is to embrace volunteering and the opportunity to teach and guide newcomers. She understands that volunteering not only benefits those on the receiving end but also enriches the lives of those who give their time and compassion.

AWARDEE:

Barbara Hitchcock **Putnam County**



Barbara Hitchcock’s volunteering journey began at the Putnam Fish & Game, where she orchestrated holiday festivities and organized family activities. Simultaneously, for a remarkable 17 years, she served as a Bible Study assistant at the Hope and Life Church of Carmel.

Following her husband’s passing in 1997, she started volunteering at the Putnam Hospital Center. Her versatile skills benefited various hospital departments, including ambulatory surgery and the main lobby reception. She later became an esteemed member of the Putnam Hospital Auxiliary Board. There, she plays a pivotal role in organizing the annual Putnam Hospital Center Kids’ Day event.

In 2008, Hitchcock joined the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, now known as Putnam Senior Corps. She began her service at the Eagle Eye Thrift Shop and currently dedicates her time to the main lobby reception desk at Putnam Hospital Center, contributing wherever her assistance is required. Since joining the team, she has generously donated over 15,000 hours of her time to Putnam County.

Born at Peekskill Hospital on April 16, 1941, Hitchcock has been a lifelong resident of New York State. She spent her formative years in Peekskill before moving to Mahopac with her husband, Albert, in 1969. Together, they raised two children, Albert and Catherine. In addition to her immediate family, she has been blessed with five grandchildren: Jessie, Gina, Barbara Ashley, Ava, and Bryan, as well as three great-grandchildren.

When asked for her insights on volunteering, she emphasized the importance of staying active and involved. She believes that keeping busy is key to living a healthy and fulfilling life and that the joy derived from helping others is “immeasurable.”



AWARDEE:

Madeline Martinez

Queens County

Madeline “Maddy” Martinez’s commitment to volunteerism at the Latimer Gardens Older Adult Center (OAC) has been unwavering since 2019 when she initially started with the food pantry linked to her church. This pantry, based at Latimer Gardens OAC, served as her initial platform for volunteering. Later, she received an invitation to join the center’s volunteer team, where she embraced expanded responsibilities. She began running an arts and crafts class – a role she passionately fulfilled until the center’s temporary closure during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. When pandemic-related restrictions eased, she eagerly resumed her involvement with the monthly food pantry distribution. When the center’s chef vacated his position, she promptly stepped into the kitchen to assist.

She is a New York native and Queens resident who grew up as one of seven children. She married shortly after high school, and her life took a challenging turn when her husband was drafted and sent to Vietnam, where he contracted walking pneumonia. Tragically, he received insufficient treatment and was redeployed to the battlefield. Upon his return to New York, he succumbed to complications stemming from the untreated condition. Becoming a single mother, she took on the responsibility of raising her son alone, working multiple jobs to provide for their needs. Her son, Jose, has since become a paramedic on Long Island and has two daughters. In addition to her daily volunteer commitment at the center, Martinez selflessly devotes her weekends to caring for her disabled twin sister.

“I enjoy volunteering because I am a people person,” she says. “I enjoy being around people and helping others because everyone needs help sometimes. I also enjoy volunteering because it gives me a continued sense of purpose and sense of community.”

AWARDEE:

Mark Mehler
Queens County



Mark Mehler is a remarkable volunteer within the Friendly Visiting program at Sunnyside Community Services. His commitment extends beyond the official role, as he independently visits older adults referred to him by social worker acquaintances. He possesses a remarkable blend of empathy and knowledge that enriches his interactions. Upon joining the program, he navigated the complex matching processes, establishing clear boundaries to ensure mutually beneficial relationships. Notably, he has managed multiple matches concurrently, successfully enhancing the lives of older adults.

A native New Yorker, Mehler was born in Manhattan and raised on Long Island. For the past 42 years, he has been a resident of Jackson Heights in Queens. Mehler’s career spans many roles, initially as a newspaper and magazine journalist for over three decades before transitioning into social services case management in 2004. Despite his career shift, his passion for writing remained unabated. In the past five years, he has authored two non-fiction books and is presently immersed in crafting a third. He retired from his social services role in 2022. He also shares a 28-year partnership in marriage with another dedicated Sunnyside Community Services volunteer.

“There are many ways to give back to your community,” he says. “The key is just to find a volunteer opportunity that excites you and offers a way to put all the skills you’ve acquired over a lifetime to good use.”



AWARDEE:

Joseph Johnson
Richmond County



Joseph Johnson has volunteered at the Todt Hill Friendship Club for the last ten years. He always helps decorate the center for events, walks other older adults out to their cars when needed, and helps pour the coffee when there are many people in the center. He will also wait with the older participants outside for their rides to come and pick them up.

Johnson is a native Staten Islander, born and raised in West Brighton. He has three sisters and two brothers and worked for New York City Housing Authority for 25 years. He painted the building's apartments, took care of the lawn around the property, and fixed any broken lighting on the premises. He worked on the same grounds he currently volunteers on. He is known as a kind and caring person as he is always around to help his friends and family. He deeply cares about his neighborhood as he's lived in Todt Hill for 20 years.

"Volunteering is a beautiful thing," he says. "I enjoy helping my fellow seniors. It's a pleasure to make them smile. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."



AWARDEE:

Chris & Bert Hughes Rockland County

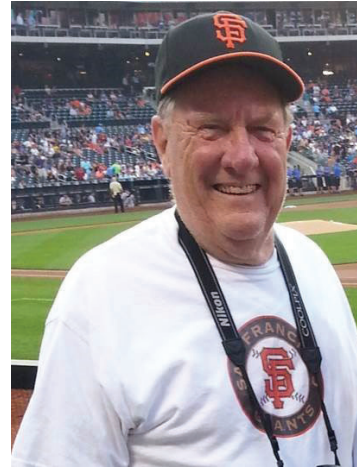
The Rockland County Interfaith Breakfast Program owes its success to the determined spirit of Chris and Bert Hughes. As founding organizers of Helping Hands of Rockland, an organization dedicated to supporting the homeless, this dynamic couple exemplifies selflessness and community commitment. Their day would start as early as 4:30 a.m., diligently preparing hot breakfasts and bagged lunches for Rockland County's less fortunate.

One of their recent triumphs was the establishment of a custom-made mobile kitchen for Helping Hands of Rockland, ensuring fresh, hot meals reach those who need them most. While already serving 400 breakfasts and bagged lunches daily from the Church at the Nazarene in Spring Valley, Chris and Bert recognized the growing need and expanded their efforts.

Together, Chris and Bert have dedicated over 40 years to their community. Their love story spanned more than 53 years until Bert's passing on August 16, 2023. Bert Hughes was a model of community leadership, leaving an indelible mark on Rockland County. His passion for music and the arts brought joy to thousands and enriched the community. As integral members of the Nyack Parks Commission, they initiated and coordinated the Mostly Music summer concerts in Memorial Park, offering families a musical experience by the Hudson River. A gazebo in the park proudly bears Bert's and Chris's names.

Bert's influence extended to the arts, where he played a pivotal role in launching the Edward Hopper House Museum's summer music series in the garden, a tradition now spanning over four decades. He also served on the organization's board of trustees and received the County Executive Arts Award in 1999.

AWARDEE:
Art Manion
Rockland County



At the age of 84, Art Manion’s journey as a volunteer leader with Meals on Wheels Rockland is a testament to the transformative power of simple acts of kindness. Manion embodies the essence of a “good neighbor,” both within his work providing home-delivered meals and throughout his lifelong residency in Rockland County.

Manion’s legacy of service began over six decades ago as a volunteer firefighter with the Columbian Fire Company in Spring Valley, where he held multiple leadership roles. Even after an astounding 62 years of service to his community, Manion’s commitment did not waver. At the age of 80, he transitioned into a volunteer role with Meals on Wheels Rockland, serving as a dedicated driver.

During the pandemic, his impact was immeasurable. Manion assisted in sorting and packing groceries for older adults, ensuring food safety, and brightening the spirits of exhausted staff with his infectious optimism. His role as the ultimate “Greeter” not only fosters volunteer retention but also sets the stage for positive interactions with homebound meal recipients.

A Spring Valley High School graduate in 1957, Manion was not only a devoted firefighter but also an avid bowler, hunter, fisherman, and exceptional dancer. He and his beloved late wife, Rosemarie Dell’Olio, owned the local business Manion’s Complete Maintenance until the mid-1990s. After a brief stint in New Jersey, they returned to Rockland County in 2016.

Manion’s remarkable journey continues with recent accolades as the “best dancer” at local dances, as well as his enthusiastic attendance at Clarkstown Summer Concerts, unwavering support for the New York Boulders baseball team, invigorating swims at Lake Nanuet, and cherished moments with friends and family.

Manion’s life story is an ode to service, joy, and the enduring impact one person can have on a community.

AWARDEE:

Barbara Broderson

Saratoga County



Barbara Broderson has been a part of the Milton Seniors' board for years, holding various offices, the latest involving recruitment of new members. Broderson is also a part of the Advisory Council for the Saratoga County Department of Aging and Youth Services, providing a strong voice for older adults in her town of Milton. Over her 11 years of service, she has consistently helped transport older adults who no longer drive to medical appointments and for shopping. She clearly enjoys helping those in need, especially if that need is a hot meal. As a home-delivered meal driver, she has delivered likely hundreds of meals to older adults who are no longer able to drive or cook for themselves.

Broderson was born in New Rochelle, New York and has lived in Ballston Spa since 1969. She has been married to her husband, Jack, for 56 years. She has trained as a private pilot, has a motorcycle license, and drove a Harley for years. She also is a part owner of a pro stock car that has won championships at Fonda Raceway.

"Be altruistic," she says. "Never underestimate the difference you can make in the lives of others. Step forward, reach out, and help."



AWARDEE:

Kathleen Eitzmann **Saratoga County**



Kathy Eitzmann is the President and Activity Chair of the Malta Seniors, where she frequently advocates for older adults in her area. During the 2020 pandemic, Eitzmann also helped connect older adults with local volunteers to help them with needs ranging from food/grocery delivery to yard work. In addition, she volunteered as a telecare caller during the early days of the pandemic, a program that helps reach older adults who may feel lonely and isolated. She is a dedicated citizen, constantly standing up and using her voice, including through her role as an advisor from the Town of Malta with the Saratoga County Department of Aging and Youth Services Advisory Council. One of her most beloved volunteer sites is the Milton Community Center as an assistant to the Gather & Dine congregate meal program.

Eitzmann was born and raised in the state of Nebraska on a dairy farm in rural America. Her mother, Ann, was a great influence on her role as a volunteer. She gave her time serving organizations, both locally and on a state level, in many capacities.

Eitzmann has been married to her husband, Murray, for 48 years. They enjoy playing backyard volleyball, boating on Lake George, spending time with family and friends, as well as traveling and camping.

“Get out there and volunteer,” she says. “It’s rewarding to give your time to others!”



AWARDEE:

Barbara Wurz Schenectady County

Barbara Wurz dedicated an illustrious 35-year career to educating elementary students in physical education in Scotia-Glenville. Her commitment to enhancing physical education programs, despite funding constraints, earned her a reputation as a resourceful advocate. Wurz's success in securing a remarkable \$1 million grant for physical education initiatives led to her role as grant manager for three years. Her contributions garnered recognition through Scotia-Glenville's Distinguished Service Award and the prestigious Capital District Amazing Person Award from the New York State Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AHPERD) in 2019.

Her dedication extended to volunteer roles within AHPERD, where she served as a jump rope coordinator for an impressive 22 years. Even today, she continues to support AHPERD conferences and student leadership awards. Over the past decade, she has overseen student physical education teachers, providing valuable guidance to Capital District schools.

Beyond the classroom, Wurz has served on the Park Planning Commission since the mid-1980s. Leveraging her position as a teacher and community member, she has tirelessly advocated for the development of town parks. Her efforts have enriched the community with many youth sports leagues and recreational opportunities, catering to individuals of all ages.

A lifelong resident of Schenectady County, Wurz was born and raised in Scotia, New York. She and her husband chose to raise their family in Burnt Hills and celebrated their remarkable 50th wedding anniversary in August 2023.

She says: "Everyone has a different time available, but give what you can to give back to the community. Help your children learn to be volunteers."



AWARDEE:
Dominick Franzese, Jr.
Schuyler County

Dominick Franzese, Jr. has played a pivotal role in shaping his community of Watkins Glen, New York. As a founding member of “Watkins Glen Tomorrow” in the 1970s, he embraced the mission to foster innovation and expansion within his local community. Through brainstorming, planning, and action, he dedicated himself to steering his beloved hometown toward a brighter future.

Working with the Chamber of Commerce, Franzese invested time and energy in nurturing his community’s growth. His contributions also shone through in his roles within the local Elks Lodge, St. Mary’s of the Lake Church, and the Rotary Club.

Reflecting on the past 50 years, he described the progress in Watkins Glen as “unbelievable.” His pride is palpable in collaborating with fellow community members, especially his wife, to enhance the quality of life for friends and neighbors. Watkins Glen is not just a place where he resides; it’s a place he cherishes as home.

Born and raised in Watkins Glen, Franzese and his wife, Midge, raised two daughters, Margaret and Julie. They have two granddaughters and three grandsons.

Franzese’s career journey included 25 years in the family-owned construction business before transitioning to real estate, where he spent 43 years as the owner and operator of Franzese Realty Service.

Volunteering, for him, is a means to stay connected, contribute to progress, and, as he aptly put it, “gives me a good feeling.”



AWARDEE:

Claudia Moulton

St. Lawrence County

On August 4, 2023, Claudia Moulton achieved a milestone as she was honored with the “Marcia Oney Award,” a prestigious induction into the “Sports Hall of Fame” at Madrid-Waddington Central School. Her recognition stems from decades of selfless dedication and contributions to the Madrid-Waddington School Athletics Community.

In 1994, she earned the “Certificate of Appreciation for Quality Service in Education” at Madrid-Waddington Central School. Her outstanding teaching prowess led to her inclusion in “Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers” in both 1996 and 1998.

Beyond her academic endeavors, Moulton served as a leader for numerous years in the Brownie, Daisy, and Junior Girl Scouts. She also lent her support to the Winthrop, New York Junior Grange. In recognition of her remarkable contributions, the Grange of Madrid, New York, honored Moulton as the “Outstanding Citizen of Madrid” in 2022.

Moulton consistently goes out of her way to assist those in need, providing transportation to doctor appointments, meetings for older adults, and various activities, even handling grocery shopping. She adamantly refuses compensation for gas or other expenses.

A lifelong resident of St. Lawrence County, Moulton has called Stockholm her home. Her teaching career spanned four decades, beginning with first grade at Madrid-Waddington Central School District from September 1969 to June 1985, followed by kindergarten from September 1985 to June 2009. She actively supported her students throughout their educational journeys, attending sporting events, plays, and other significant milestones. She also served as the coach for the girls’ JV basketball team in 1981-1982.

Moulton’s extraordinary volunteerism spans more than 54 years, benefiting multiple community groups. Additionally, she has been a dedicated member of the New York Statewide Senior Action Council for many years, generously providing items for door prizes at their Seniorama. She is also a longstanding member of the St. Lawrence County Council of Senior Citizens, currently representing the Quadtown Senior Club.

Moulton is often described as a humble, kind-hearted individual who extends a helping hand to anyone and everyone, expecting nothing in return. When asked about her advice on volunteering, Moulton’s simple yet profound response is, “It does your heart good.”



AWARDEE:
Carol Israel
Steuben County



Since taking on a leadership role with QKA Aging in Place, Carol Israel has energized the community to come together for fun. She has organized popular events, including the annual Valentine’s Brunch. Aside from her grassroots fundraising work, Israel has a keen eye for detail and knowing how best to reach her audience. Her following has grown, and she has been able to secure a \$10,000 grant to support aging-in-place operations. She is well-known and loved, because of all the lives she has changed for the better.

Israel was born in Wayland, New York. Soon after, her family moved to Hammondsport, New York. In 1972, she left Hammondsport and resided in Florida, Maryland and Virginia. She was the primary caregiver for both of her parents for 12 years until they passed. She retired with her husband, Tom, to live on the same property where she was raised in Hammondsport. She lost her beloved husband of 35 years in 2020.

“Volunteer because you care,” she says. “Improve the lives of others by using your past life experiences that made you a better human being, whether from work or your personal life.”

AWARDEE:

Andrew Mazzella
Steuben County



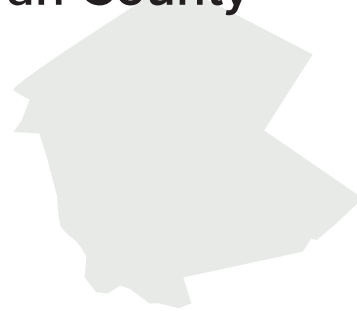
Andy Mazzella's life journey has been defined by a spirit of service. His professional path spans seven years as a life insurance salesman, a seven-year tenure as the mayor of Hornell, New York, and an impactful 18-year role as the Regional Director of Operations for Finger Lakes State Parks. He continued his community service work as the Executive Director of United Way for nine years and later as the Director of Emergency Services at Turning Point, a program under Catholic Charities, for twelve years.

Born in Hornell, New York, Mazzella currently resides in Hammondsport, New York, alongside his wife, Sharon, relishing the sense of community that thrives in a small town nestled within the Finger Lakes region. However, his greatest joy stems from spending quality time with his children, grandchildren, and friends, always welcoming new connections.

He passionately embraces his responsibility to give back to society in every possible way. He firmly believes that opportunities to extend a helping hand are never far, and he encourages others to seize those opportunities, recognizing the transformative power of their actions in changing lives.



AWARDEE:
Jack Luster
Sullivan County



Jack Luster radiates positivity with a smile that uplifts those around him. He is known for soothing hearts and souls with his music and genuine warmth.

Luster's many volunteer activities include affiliations with the Mended Hearts Association, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Sullivan County, food distributions for the less fortunate, Ronald McDonald House, Camp Simcha, Catholic Charities, and performing on the flute during Christmas Mass. He also lends his saxophone talents to food pantries and homeless shelters, while playing the flute at the local synagogue and crafting balloon animals at Marie's Park in Woodbourne, New York.

Born in Miami, Florida, Luster moved to Monticello, New York, at the age of five, where his parents established and operated the West End Diner. After residing in New York City between the ages of 20 and 32, he returned to Monticello when his father fell ill.

In his own words, "You receive back more than you give," a testament to the profound impact volunteering has had on his life.

AWARDEE:

Karin Pantel
Sullivan County



Karin Pantel's dedication to volunteerism is evident through her active involvement in multiple organizations. Her passion for education and advocacy has driven her to make a meaningful impact in her community.

As a community educator for the Alzheimer's Association, Hudson Valley Chapter, Pantel utilized her extensive nursing background to educate individuals about Alzheimer's Disease. She participated in the Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM) as a member of the Alzheimer's Congressional Team for her region. Her efforts took her to the 2022 AIM Advocacy Forum in Washington, D.C., where she engaged with Congressional members and staff to advance legislation.

In addition to her work with the Alzheimer's Association, Pantel joined the New York State Rural Health Association (NYSARH), where she was elected to its board in 2022. Her involvement in NYSARH reflects her dedication to improving health care access and resources in rural communities.

Pantel's roots in Sullivan County have instilled in her a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by rural communities, particularly in health care. Throughout her life, she has been a tireless advocate, providing education and information to raise awareness and address these challenges.

Her advice to aspiring volunteers is clear: "Start by considering the causes or issues that you genuinely care about. Think about what motivates you and where you believe you can make a meaningful impact. Identifying your passions will help you find volunteer opportunities that align with your values. Volunteering is a rewarding experience. Your efforts, no matter how small, can make a significant difference in your community and beyond. Just do it!"

AWARDEE:

Betty Sinclair
Tioga County



Betty Sinclair’s dedicated volunteer work in the kitchen at Tioga Opportunities, Inc.’s Countryside Community Center has made a significant impact on the organization’s nutrition programs. Sinclair’s role is versatile, and she eagerly takes on various tasks to ensure the smooth preparation of meals for both congregate dining and home-delivered meals. Her contributions range from scooping fruits and salads to preparing sandwiches, prepping meal trays for home deliveries, washing dishes, and assisting with laundry. Her friendly demeanor and warm greetings have made her a familiar and appreciated presence among congregate diners.

Originally from New Jersey, Sinclair moved to the Southern Tier with her family when she was 12, eventually settling in Owego, New York, in 1985, where she still resides today. Her career has been centered around helping others, starting in home health care and later working for Tioga Opportunities, Inc. for 14 years. In her roles, she provided valuable support to various programs, including Head Start and as a respite worker, aiding clients in maintaining their independence in their own homes.

Beyond her volunteer work and career, she is a creative individual who enjoys pencil drawing and crafting greeting cards for her loved ones. She can often be seen walking her canine companion, Junior, around Owego.

Her advice to fellow volunteers is simple but profound: “Find something you enjoy doing and be flexible.”

AWARDEE:
**Sherry & Bill
Alberta**
Tompkins County



In 1989, Sherry and Bill Alberta initiated the Elves Program with a heartfelt mission: to bring joy and assistance to children in need. What began as a gesture of kindness by purchasing gifts for a few children in a local elementary school has since grown into a transformative force, impacting the lives of up to 1,000 children annually through three distinct programs.

The Winter Holiday Program stands at the core of their efforts, spanning across forty schools in Tompkins County and its surrounding areas. Here, nurses and social workers identify children facing the greatest need, creating profiles shared with “elf leaders.” These leaders then connect with individuals, families, or groups eager to sponsor a child, providing them with new clothing and toys during the holiday season.

In 2007, an “elf leader” expanded their impact further with the Summer Backpack Program. Now assisting a thousand children annually, this initiative equips each child with a new backpack filled with school supplies, ensuring they are prepared for the upcoming academic year.

The Albertas’ third and newest program, the KozyKids Blanket Program, was inspired by a child’s simple request for a warm blanket as a holiday gift. Each year, more than 250 new, cozy blankets find their way into local schools, offering comfort during the cold months.

Sherry and Bill Alberta’s commitment to their community is a testament to their love for Ithaca, New York, where they have resided for over four decades. Their dedication extends beyond their charitable work, as they cherish time with their family, explore the beauty of nature, and engage in various hobbies. Sherry is passionate about organic gardening and cooking, while Bill finds joy in stonework and playing the mandolin. Both hail from small upstate towns and share a profound dedication to helping economically disadvantaged children.



AWARDEE: **Arthur Berkey** Tompkins County

At 91 years old, Art Berkey stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of volunteerism. For more than 35 years during his retirement, he has dedicated countless hours each week to a wide range of activities aimed at supporting his community. He can often be found repairing homes and equipment, generously distributing refurbished tools, and welcoming young children into his garage and shop to impart the wisdom of craftsmanship and the virtue of patience.

Berkey's sense of duty extends to his neighbors, who frequently turn to him for rides. When approached, he consults his meticulously maintained calendar, juggling prior commitments such as the food pantry, blood drives, or committee meetings with a commitment to assist those in need. His dedication to community service is characterized by a profound sense of integrity, and he treats every individual with the respect they deserve.

Berkey's journey began on a 133-acre farm in Michigan, where he was born as one of six children. He embarked on an academic path, earning his bachelor's, master's degree in teaching, and Ph.D. from Michigan State University. His sense of duty led him to serve in the U.S. Army for 13 years, with a notable 16-month deployment during the Korean War. In 1967, he retired as a Captain. Following the war, he pursued a career as a high school agricultural science teacher and principal in Michigan. After completing his graduate studies and marrying, he and his wife made the move to New York in 1967. Over the next 28 years, he dedicated himself to teaching at Cornell University, retiring from the institution in 1995. He now resides in Ithaca, where he continues to make a profound impact.

"Sharing your gifts by volunteering will significantly enrich your quality of life as well as the opportunity to both learn from and make friends," he says. "Each of us has received much from the contributions of others and has a responsibility to give back as we are able."

AWARDEE:

John M. Dowley, Sr.

Ulster County



John M. Dowley, Sr. is a tech-savvy champion helping older adults by demystifying technology and bridging the digital divide. He has harnessed his expertise to empower older adults, teaching them to navigate the digital landscape with confidence and reconnect with loved ones.

Dowley's journey as a technology educator began with his pivotal role in designing the inaugural Senior Computer Learning Center (SCLC) at the Business Resource Center (BRC). His vision brought together instructors, equipment, and a modest budget, laying the foundation for a pivotal hub of learning. His tireless dedication has expanded this essential center to the Senior Hub, where he orchestrates regular classes and assembles a dedicated team of instructors. His personal instruction has equipped numerous older adults with the skills to utilize devices, access the internet, and embrace the digital era.

Beyond technology education, he is a committed advocate for various causes, from diabetes awareness to affirmative action and youth development. He annually participates in the American Diabetes Association Tour de Cure, diligently raising funds for crucial research.

A native New Yorker, he has spent most of his life in Ulster County alongside his wife Carol. Their family includes three children and six grandchildren. He retired from Sears Roebuck & Co. after a 30-year career in human resources, operations, and district systems management. In retirement, he transitioned into the role of a computer technology instructor with Albany-based MicroKnowledge, Inc., where he continues to make an impact with a focus on older adults.

During his tenure at Sears in Kingston, he served on the Board of Directors of the Resource Center for Accessible Living and the Ulster County Youth Bureau. As a human resources manager in Albany, he collaborated with the Albany Area Urban League, advocating for affirmative action and inclusion measures to enhance opportunities for minorities and women.

"Giving back to the community gives me great satisfaction and continued relevance," he says.



AWARDEE:

Gai Galitzine **Ulster County**



Since 2016, Gai Galitzine has been engaged in Kingston Seniors Serving in Place (SSIP), a self-support group dedicated to helping its members gracefully age in place. Her contributions include launching a monthly newsletter featuring member updates and valuable information for older adults. When the pandemic curtailed in-person meetings at the local diner, she organized a weekly Zoom gathering, enabling members to connect safely via devices or landlines. This initiative played a pivotal role in mitigating feelings of isolation among the SSIP community.

Her longest-standing commitment, dating back to 2013, revolves around the Circle of Friends for the Dying. She initially served on the board and later transitioned into an administrative role. Her responsibilities involved establishing and managing a comprehensive database of donors and contacts, orchestrating fundraisers, and providing invaluable support wherever needed. She was instrumental in the early stages of Jim and Lisa's Circle Home, a home for the dying located in Kingston.

Around the same period, she became actively involved in Kingston Transition, a local group within the global movement against climate change. She contributed by crafting newsletters and, in 2014, co-founded the Kingston Repair Cafe alongside her husband, Dimitri, under the aegis of Kingston Transition. Their dedication steered the cafe's operations for four years until Climate Smart Kingston assumed sponsorship.

In 2015, Galitzine joined the administrative team of the Mid-Hudson Fuel Buying Co-op when it was still a relatively small collective. She takes pride in the co-op's ability to assist many during times of surging fuel oil prices.

Born in Dublin, Ireland, she spent her formative years in England. She pursued her higher education at Trinity College, Dublin, earning bachelor's and master's degrees. A serendipitous six-month assignment to New York in 1974, courtesy of her employer, The Financial Times of London, introduced her to her future husband, and she decided to make New York her home.

She emphasizes the importance of finding volunteer roles that resonate with one's passions. She believes that genuine joy in one's pursuits radiates positivity, leaving a lasting impact on others.

AWARDEE:

Bennet Driscoll Warren County



With a dedication to supporting local businesses, Ben Driscoll champions the Glens Falls area, earning him the endearing nickname “Mr. Glens Falls.”

He embodies genuineness, sincerity, selflessness, diligence, and generosity, consistently translating words into actions. His role in local governance involves advocating for the less fortunate and supporting area businesses. Leveraging his extensive experience, he advocates for programs that enhance community well-being and actively participates to stay informed and make informed decisions on behalf of the community.

Driscoll, ever service-oriented, never declines a request for assistance, reflecting his profound commitment to community betterment.

Originally from Cohasset, which is south of Boston, he has called the Glens Falls area home for approximately 37 years. Here he met his wife, Tawn. The couple recently celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. Driscoll actively engages in volunteerism and community initiatives along with Tawn, who serves as a 20-year employee of Warren County Health Services, and their son Sean, Director of Ticket Sales and Services for the Adirondack Thunder Hockey Team. Avid sports enthusiasts, they also revel in the area’s natural beauty, lakes, mountains, hiking trails, community theater, museums, music venues, and special events throughout the year.

Since March 2016, Driscoll has been associated with Catholic Charities as the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program Coordinator. In this capacity, he aids residents, including older adults, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, in preparing and submitting SNAP applications. He has also helped Catholic Charities’ program for victims of domestic violence, and he also helmed the Association of the Hearing Impaired.

Additionally, he has been the representative for the City of Glens Falls Fifth Ward on the Warren County Board of Supervisors since January 2018, following a prior stint on the Glens Falls Common Council from 2006 to 2013.



AWARDEE:

Beatriz Roman

Warren County



Beatriz “Bea” Roman is a dynamic force at the Glens Falls Senior Center, conducting Osteo Buster sessions twice a week and spearheading the popular monthly “Reading with Bea” program. She is versatile, assisting at the front desk when needed, further demonstrating her dedication to the center’s mission. Her programs draw substantial attendance and serve as a catalyst for members to engage in physical exercise and maintain their health. Listening to her read stories during “Reading with Bea” is a genuine delight for all.

Roman boasts an illustrious history of volunteerism spanning multiple organizations such as the Glens Falls Senior Center, The Chapman Museum, Mediation Matters, SUNY Adirondack Continuing Education, Tri-County Literacy Center, Inc., the Glens Falls Community Theatre, and The Charles R. Wood Theater.

Currently residing in Queensbury, New York, she relocated from New York City, where she had been a proud New Yorker for 74 years—essentially her entire life. In her earlier years, she served as an educator, teaching high school English, literacy, and English to speakers of other languages in New York City. Her fluency in Spanish enriches her communication skills. Furthermore, she is the vocal talent behind a local swing jazz ensemble, performing regularly.

Roman subscribes to the belief that volunteering offers more than one gives, given the enduring opportunities for learning and the immeasurable rewards it bestows.

AWARDEE:

Lorraine Bowen

Washington County



Lorraine Bowen's thirst for knowledge and her desire to help others have been evident throughout her life. She embarked on lifesaving training courses, acquiring Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) badges, and even delved into dialysis training to provide essential care to her husband at home. Her membership in the Kingsbury Baptist Church reflects her strong connection to her faith community.

Her adaptability and eagerness to embrace new technology are highlighted in her recent accomplishments. She fearlessly learned to operate a laptop to complete online training, impressing her peers and earning their admiration.

Bowen's volunteer journey spans over three decades and multiple roles. She selflessly volunteered for the Bay Ridge Fire Department, assisting with its Adirondack Balloon Festival booth, where she made popcorn, cotton candy, and snow cones. During visits to Cooperstown, she served as a lifeguard at the campground. At her church, she played an active role in preparing and cooking community dinners. At Skene Manor, she manages the kitchen for the tearoom and special events. Her responsibilities include food procurement, menu planning, pricing, and ensuring compliance with Department of Health requirements. She also undertook restoration work in the gift shop.

Born and raised in Whitehall, New York, Bowen has deep family roots in the community. She was the daughter of Hellen and Harry LaMay and had a sister, Jane. In 1969, she married Robert L. Bowen, sharing 53 years of marriage until his passing last year. Her family includes one son, Thomas (deceased); two stepsons, Christopher and Robert Jr.; and three grandsons: Patrick, Tommy (also deceased), and Ryan. She shares a close bond with her niece, Tami.

Her early career included waitressing and assisting her mother with cabin rentals on Lake Sunnyside during summers. She also worked for General Electric. Her talents as a seamstress led her to own Bowen's Dancing Duds, a square-dancing clothing shop in Kingsbury, New York. She additionally crafted Halloween costumes for family members of all ages, showcasing her creative prowess.



AWARDEE:
John P. Fillmore
Washington County



John Fillmore traverses the county and the nation to source rare tools and antique motors, meticulously restoring each piece to its former glory. Sponsoring Heritage Day at the historic South Argyle Church building, he brought together experts who delved into the region’s rich history, showcasing Fillmore’s remarkable collection of tools that played a pivotal role in constructing local homes centuries ago.

As a board member of the South Argyle Cemetery Association, he recognized the deteriorating condition of historic gravestones and fixtures, funding the necessary repairs and organizing volunteers who dedicated two Saturdays a year to this restoration effort. During his chairmanship of the Association, he successfully navigated New York State regulations, preserving the cemetery’s historic significance, and commissioning markers to commemorate its heritage.

He has diligently cataloged burial sites, ensuring the recognition of historical markers, such as the one he personally acquired to commemorate the Allen family, local victims of a Revolutionary War massacre in 1777. Currently, he serves as the curator of the Shushan Covered Bridge Museum, a role he has held for several years.

Over the past three years, he has been an invaluable asset to the Comfort Food pantry.

Fillmore hails from a dairy farm in South Cambridge, New York. He earned an associate degree in electrical engineering from Hudson Valley Community College, supplemented by coursework at SUNY Oswego and SUNY Adirondack. In 1966, he married Patricia Cronk, and together they raised Marie, John Jr., and Peter, while also welcoming seven grandchildren. His professional career included roles at GE, Sheridan Catheter, Tansitor, and Bates Industries, where he specialized in building automation machines.

He has generously imparted knowledge by teaching merit badges to Boy Scouts and volunteering at the Farmer’s Museum at the Washington County fairgrounds. He is soon publishing a captivating story for all ages, titled “The Further Adventures of Jack and the Giant,” featuring illustrations by his friend Kathy Byrnes.

“Volunteers are true patriots,” he says.

AWARDEE:

Sarah Bracey White

Westchester County



As the Executive Director of the Arts & Culture Council for the Town of Greenburgh, Sarah Bracey White has made a lasting impact through her visionary leadership. Under her guidance, the Arts & Culture Council achieved the prestigious Westchester Arts Council Millennium Award for Community Arts Education, recognizing the organization's outstanding contributions to the community.

She has been instrumental in creating a nurturing environment for local artists, fostering their growth and creativity through art exhibits, galleries, and writing workshops. Notably, she has played a pivotal role in leading The Poetry Caravan, a network of local poets who generously share their original works and conduct poetry writing workshops in senior centers, assisted living facilities, shelters, and jails.

Beyond her role as Executive Director, she is a multifaceted artist with an impressive body of work as a playwright, fiction and non-fiction writer, memoirist, poet, and stage performer. She has been an Inaugural Fellow at the Purchase College Writers Center and has received esteemed awards from both the Westchester Arts Council and the National Writers Union in recognition of her outstanding service and leadership.

She is happily married to her husband, Robert, and is a stepmother to her daughters Lisa and Suzanne, and to her son Robert.



AWARDEE:

Frank Williams
Westchester County

Frank Williams, the dedicated Executive Director of the White Plains Youth Bureau, has championed programs that have positively impacted the lives of more than 7,000 children. His visionary initiative, Grandpas United, harnesses the wisdom, skills, and experiences of “Grandpas” to benefit the youth. Its resounding success has not only secured funding but also spurred its expansion into New Rochelle, Port Chester, Ossining, and Peekskill.

Beyond his role at the White Plains Youth Bureau, Williams has been instrumental in establishing after-school programs and a senior ministry at Bethel Baptist Church. With a lifelong dedication to public service, he has earned numerous accolades, including the National Volunteer Service Award from President Barack Obama, the Dr. Carter G. Woodson Award from Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, and the City of White Plains Human Rights Distinguished Service Award, among others.

Williams’ journey from his roots in Canton, Mississippi – a region marked by racial tensions and inequality – has deeply influenced his commitment to social change. He proudly holds a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Tougaloo College in Mississippi, a historically significant institution. After relocating to White Plains, New York, in 1974, he embarked on a fulfilling career while simultaneously earning his master’s degree in social work from Fordham University.

He is happily married to his wife, Ann, and takes pride in being a loving father to his two daughters, Timeka and Cherylyn.

For Williams, the essence of volunteering lies in making a profound difference and serving humanity. He firmly believes that our lives should revolve around compassion and neighborly love rather than material wealth. Extending kindness and empathy to those in need is a virtue, he says.



AWARDEE:

Ronald Barvian Wyoming County



Ronald Barvian is a dedicated and enthusiastic supporter of numerous organizations, generously volunteering his time and expertise across a wide range of community initiatives. These include the Strykersville Senior Group, Fish and Wildlife Management Bureau (FWMB), Wyoming County Fair, Local Tractor Pull, Harris Corners Fire Department, and serving as a hunting course instructor. He also plays an active role in the Java Conservation Club, North South Skirmish Association, the Board of Assessment Review for the Town of Sheldon, the Wyoming County Wildlife Federation, Sons of the American Legion, East Aurora Moose Lodge, and the Folsomdale Trailblazers snowmobile club.

A proud native New Yorker, his passion for volunteering was instilled at a young age and continues to flourish. At 83 years old, he is resilient in the face of any challenge. Barvian has five children, twelve grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

AWARDEE:

Linda McGuire

Wyoming County



Linda McGuire is a dynamic force within Wyoming County, always engaged in lending her support and expertise to various initiatives. She is known for helping those in need, employing her knowledge and boundless energy to make a significant impact.

One recent example was her rapid response to the opening of a new congregate meal site by the Wyoming County Office for the Aging in Perry. Recognizing the immediate demand, she swiftly stepped in to assist the meal site coordinator, driving an impressive turnout of over 70 older adults attending weekly. Her proactive involvement continues to be a driving force behind the success of this program.

A lifelong resident of New York, McGuire's core values revolve around her church, family, and community. Her parish occupies a central place in her life, where she serves as a sacristan, meticulously overseeing and preparing everything required for daily Liturgy. She is an active member of various church committees.

Her late husband was an ordained deacon in the Buffalo Diocese, and she wholeheartedly supported his ministry while continuing to carry on the mission of helping others. She encourages people to recognize their unique talents and offer them in service to those in need.

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