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CURRENT RESIDENT OR

## Veterans Update

from  
Assemblyman  
**Robin  
Schimminger**



2006 Legislative Session

Dear Friend,

During the current legislative session in Albany a number of bills have been enacted into law that directly affect veterans. Therefore, I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on these measures.

Should you have any questions or want any additional information on any of these initiatives, please feel free to contact my office at 873-2540.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin".

Robin Schimminger

## Changes to the Veterans Property Tax Exemption

Currently, if a veteran with a veterans property tax exemption buys a new home in the same municipality after the city or town's taxable status date, that veteran must reapply for the exemption and it will not take effect until the following year. As a result, that veteran could lose his or her veterans exemption for six months or more.

Legislation that I supported to correct this situation (A.974/S.7384) has passed both houses of the Legislature and now awaits the Governor's signature. Municipalities will be allowed to pass a local law permitting the assessor to transfer or prorate a veterans exemption if the veteran moves within the same municipality during that fiscal year. Although the veteran homeowner would have to reapply for the exemption on his or her new home for the following year, this approach would allow the exemption to be granted during the transition time.

Another change in the veterans exemption affects veterans with serious service-connected disabilities who receive or are eligible for the "eligible funds" exemption. Under current law, the primary residence of a seriously disabled veteran is wholly exempt from taxation, special ad valorem levies, and special assessments, provided that the residence was purchased with financial assistance from the federal government (VA Specially Adapted Homes program) and the property is equipped with special facilities to accommodate the veteran's disability. That law has now been amended (Chapter 46 of the Laws of 2006) so that a seriously disabled veteran who is eligible for, but does not receive, funds under the VA Specially Adapted Homes program is now eligible for the exemption. Also, a veteran who receives a grant and uses it to modify his home instead of purchasing another house is still eligible for the full exemption. This provision goes into effect on January 1, 2007.



## Saluting Gold Star Mothers

While attending this year's Twin Cities Memorial Day Parade, Assemblyman Schimminger visited with Gold Star Mother Lois Schroeder, Anna Mae Jones of Post 264's Auxiliary and Gold Star Mother Lillian Vanderheid Schulte. Gold Star Mothers have lost a son or daughter during wartime. The last Sunday in September has been designated as "Gold Star Mother Day" in New York State by legislation that was passed by both houses and signed by the Governor.

## Honoring the 299<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion

Last fall, long-time Town of Tonawanda resident Mike Accordino approached me regarding plans for the 63<sup>rd</sup> reunion of the U.S. Army's 299<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion at Fort Niagara. Mr. Accordino noted that members of the 299<sup>th</sup> were predominately New Yorkers and all were inducted at Fort Niagara. Therefore, he suggested that part of the roadway leading to Fort Niagara be dedicated to the 299<sup>th</sup>.

I thought Mr. Accordino's suggestion was a great one. Fort Niagara itself has a long and distinguished military history that dates back to 1726. This historic military fortress served as a training station and active barracks from the Civil War until the last army units were withdrawn in 1962. During World War II, Fort Niagara was the induction center for all of the army recruits who were to become mem-

bers of the 299<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion. The battalion's official history notes that "trainloads of men arrived (at Camp White, Oregon) nearly every day – all of them from Fort Niagara, New York, until our strength was built up to battalion level." These men, many of them boyhood friends, came from Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Rochester, Auburn, Syracuse and many small towns in between.

Given the special tie between the 299<sup>th</sup> and Fort Niagara, I immediately wrote and introduced a bill in Albany to designate portions of the Niagara Thruway and Robert Moses Parkway, beginning at the intersection of the I-190 and River Road in the Town of Tonawanda and ending in Fort Niagara State Park in the Village of Youngstown, as the *299<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Bat-*

*talion Memorial Highway*. So, as the veterans of the 299<sup>th</sup> gathered at Fort Niagara this June to renew friendships and remember deceased and fallen comrades, the legislation dedicating the roadways to Fort Niagara in their honor was being finalized by the Legislature. That bill, A.10576/S.7329, has now been passed by both houses and signed by the Governor.

This dedication is a fitting tribute to the brave soldiers of the 299<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion, whose unparalleled bravery was evidenced by numerous military decorations, which included the Distinguished Unit Citation and Bronze Service Star for each of the following campaigns: Normandy, Northern France; the Rhineland, Ardennes and Central Europe.

## Attention, Vietnam Vets

Since 1996, there has been a discrepancy in the dates used by New York State and the federal government to mark the beginning of the Vietnam War. Initially, December 22, 1961, was the common date used to mark the start of the conflict. However, the federal government has changed the date to February 28, 1961, and now New York State law has been changed to match

the federal date. As a result, Vietnam era vets who were denied state benefits because of these conflicting dates will now be eligible for them.

Also, another new law extends New York State's statute of limitations for Agent Orange claims for armed forces personnel who served in Indo-China for two additional years to June 16, 2008.

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# Purple Heart Hall of Honor

New York State is constructing a Purple Heart Hall of Honor to recognize members of the armed services who were wounded or killed in action. As a tribute to Purple Heart recipients, the Hall of Honor will not only chronicle the names of the recipients, but will serve as a repository of their memories and accounts of sacrifice. These powerful remembrances will be told via displays, interactive attractions, a Web site, a computerized database and a recording studio where they can record their accounts.

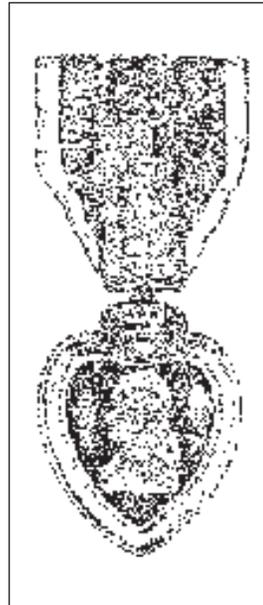
The Hall of Honor will be located at the New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site in the Hudson Valley. It was at this wooded site in 1782 that George Washington created the Badge of Military Merit, which he decreed would be the "figure of a heart in purple cloth." Although the badge fell into disuse after the Revolutionary War, it was reintroduced as the Purple Heart in 1932 and since 1942 has been limited to those wounded or killed

in action.

Our community, of course, has many hometown heroes who have been awarded the Purple Heart. Some of these recipients paid the ultimate price and have been memorialized by the naming of an organization or building in their honor - Stephen Sikora, Conrad Kania, Harry Crosby, Milton Brounschidle, Edward Grabiarz and others. While memories of Christopher Dill, Peter Tycz II and others are fresh in our recollections because of their more recent deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, many other veterans have been awarded the Purple Heart in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and other faraway places. They all deserve to be recognized at our state's

Hall of Honor.

I have made it a personal commitment to identify Purple Heart recipients from the 140<sup>th</sup> Assembly District for inclusion in the state's new Hall of Honor. While I have already accumulated a number of names, I need your help to make sure no one is forgotten. If there is a Purple Heart recipient in your immediate family or part of your family tree, or a friend, neighbor, acquaintance or former comrade-in-arms from Kenmore or the Tonawandas, please feel free to forward his or her name to my office by calling 873-2540 or, better yet, drop me a written note. A photo of the recipient and, if possible, information on his or her service would also be appreciated.



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## Vets Honored with New York State Medals



**Honoring our veterans** – On February 12<sup>th</sup>, Assemblyman Schimminger presented New York State’s highest military honors to veterans and current servicemen and women who served in the armed forces in World War II, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. The medals were awarded at this year’s “In the Company of Heroes” ceremony in recognition of exceptional bravery, outstanding service or other special accomplish-

*Pictured, seated from left to right:* Dawn Marie Dill, who was presented with a posthumous award honoring her husband, Christopher Dill, a Tonawanda soldier who was killed in Iraq, Floyd C. Wildt and Edward “Doc” Butler with Assemblyman Robin Schimminger. *Standing from left to right are:*, Jason Jaskula, James R. Davis, Richard J. Kazinski, Edward Stefik, Raymond Metzger, Robynn L. Murray, Michael S. Frushone, Alan W. Frankowsky, Bikramjit Singh, David C. Mitchell, Anthony Mott, Matthew Daggett, Martin M. Nicolette, Dennis Criddle, Andrew Shonitsky, Timothy J. Oldenburg, Jose Suarez, William J. Patterson, Charles Menzemer, Benjamin J. Wojtas, James P. Laudan and Alphonse H. Staskiewicz.

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## Cold War Medal

Combat veterans have long been recognized for their bravery and valor with the presentation of various awards and decorations. Unfortunately, similar recognition and accolades have not been given to the thousands of men and women who served honorably during the Cold War.

I am working to change that in New York State and am supporting legislation in the Assembly, A.10966, which would create a new state military award, the Cold War Medal. This decoration would

be awarded to any person who was a New York State resident while serving in the armed forces during the “Cold War” era, September 2, 1945, through December 26, 1991, or who now resides in New York. Although this bill was passed by the Assembly on May 22, the Senate has not yet acted on this measure.

It is fitting to recognize the dedicated men and women who “stood watch” and halted the spread of communist domination and the threat of nuclear war. Their ef-

forts in promoting world peace and stability, and their participation in hundreds of military exercises and operations that occurred during this era, should receive proper recognition.

Those who served during the Cold War do currently qualify for a Certificate of Recognition issued by the federal government. For more information, feel free to contact my district office at 873-2540.