Veterans Day Tribute

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Odell Honors Two Veterans during Row of Honor Opening Ceremony

Putnam County’s Row of Honor has become a cherished tradition in the lower Hudson Valley. To recognize the efforts of the men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces, Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell presented two Veterans, Bob Palmer of Brewster and Ryan Lepore of Putnam Valley, with flags sponsored on their behalf, at the opening ceremony of the Veterans Day Row of Honor on Monday.

“Veterans cannot be thanked enough for their service and sacrifice,” said Odell. “By choosing to honor Bob Palmer, a 95-year old WWII veteran, and Ryan Lepore, a 28-year-old who returned home in 2010 after serving overseas, we remember the Veterans who walk amongst us every day. It is similar to the recognition that the Marines give the oldest and youngest soldiers who attend the Marine Ball."

The Row of Honor is the installation of over 200 red, white and blue American flags with the names of Veterans, law enforcement officers and first responders, lines along the shores of Lake Gleneida to honor the men and women who served, or continue to serve, to protect us and defend our freedoms. It is on display twice a year to observe Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

“Our veterans and service personnel should always be honored,” said Odell. “The Row of Honor is our way of making sure Putnam residents – and anyone else who visits the Hamlet of Carmel - are reminded of all these wonderful men and women who have done and continue to do for us.”

The Row of Honor began in 2013 and was so well received by the public that Odell decided to make it a semi-annual event. The Row of Honor is a fundraising venture among the Joint Veterans Council, Putnam County Tourism and Putnam County government. This year, money raised through sponsorships of the flags will be used to support the Putnam County Veterans and Military Museum, which is located in Veterans Memorial Park in Kent.

In addition to the colorful display of American-made Stars and Stripes there will be flags representing the five branches of the United States Armed Forces: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard. There will also be flags representing the Army and Air National Guards, Merchant Marines, Fraternal Order of Police, POW/MIAs and a special 9/11 flag.

Sponsorships may be purchased for $100 per flag. Checks should be made out to the Joint Veterans Council and sent to the Putnam County Veterans Affairs Office, Donald B. Smith Government Campus, 110 Old Route 6, Bldg. 3, Carmel, NY 10512. For further information, call Mimi at (845) 808-1620 or go online to putnamcountyny.com/roh.

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell presented Veterans Bob Palmer of Brewster (left) and Ryan Lepore of Putnam Valley (right) with flags sponsored on their behalf at the opening ceremony of the Row of Honor on Monday.
Maloney Looks to Pass Wounded Warrior Employment Improvement Act

In advance of Veterans Day, Representative Sean Patrick Maloney (NY-18), the son of a Navy veteran, called on Congress to pass his Wounded Warrior Employment Improvement Act. Rep. Maloney’s bill would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to improve job training and rehabilitation services for veterans with service-connected disabilities. Supported by AFGE, The American Legion, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) and VetsFirst, H.R. 356 would reduce unemployment among disabled veterans by requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to reduce caseloads, increase enrollment in education programs, and implement a new training program for staff working with wounded warriors. A 2014 study by the US Government Accountability Office identified a series of shortcomings with the VA’s primary program for assisting combat disabled veterans enter and re-enter the workforce. According to a study by the VA, half of our veterans face a period of unemployment upon transition to civilian life. Maloney was joined by Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus, Director of Admissions for Graduate Programs and Adult Degree Retention at Mount Saint Mary College Lisa Gallina, Adjunct Professor Lieutenant Colonel Bruno Gaita, as well as student veterans.

“It’s unacceptable that the brave men and women who sacrifice so much in service to our country are returning home from battle only to struggle to find a job. We must make these commonsense reforms to the VA’s key employment program to support these wounded warriors and ensure our highly skilled veterans secure employment upon their return to civilian life,” said Maloney.

“It is essential for veterans to receive academic and career support services in a compassionate and effective manner. At Mount Saint Mary College we offer many programs to assist veterans in reaching their goals; academic advising, career counseling, counseling services and social programming. We strongly believe it is our responsibility to serve those who have served our country. Too often veterans reach us who have been misguided educationally or ignored by those organizations that don’t have the capacity to serve them appropriately,” said Lisa Gallina, Director of Admissions for Graduate Programs and Adult Degree Retention.

“Our disabled veterans deserve our utmost support when returning from combat. The changes to the VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program proposed in this legislation will allow for a streamlined approach to training and educating our wounded warriors which will assist them in securing viable employment and allow them to successfully transition back to civilian life,” said New York State Senator Bill Larkin.

“With military careers often cut short by life-altering injuries, it is particularly important that this generation of wounded warriors be afforded the tools, skills, resources, education, and support needed to find their new passion, secure employment, and develop fulfilling careers in ways that matter to them and their families. But, for a variety of reasons, the VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation, and Employment Program, which is designed to give disabled veterans the help they need to gain success in the workforce, is too often failing them. WWP supports H.R. 356 which would direct VA to develop an action plan aimed at improving the delivery of effective vocational rehabilitation and employment services to wounded warriors – often critical to these warriors achieving economic empowerment, a key to successful transition and productive lives,” said Charlie Abell of the Wounded Warrior Project.

“VA must be more responsive to the vocational rehabilitation needs of veterans living with significant disabilities, including PTSD and TBI. Requiring VA to better address workforce management issues and improve counselor training will lead to better employment outcomes for these veterans,” said Christine Golden of VetsFirst.

As a GAO report identified, the VR&E program is hobbled by caseworker to veteran ratios as high as 175 to 1, high dropout rates and difficulties in meeting the needs of veterans with TBI and PTSD. According a recent survey, the unemployment rate among Wounded Warrior Project alumni is nearly 18 percent. In New York, the average veterans unemployment rate was at 8.2 percent throughout 2013.
 Hundreds of local veterans and their families enjoyed the first Veterans Chow Down hosted by State Senators Terrence Murphy and Sue Serino and Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell held on Sunday, Nov. 1 at the Putnam County Golf Course. The event, which was presented in cooperation of the PFC Joseph Dwyer Vet2Vet Program, paid tribute to the men and men from Putnam County who served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

“The goal of today’s event was to offer a small token of appreciation to the brave men and women who defended our freedoms,” Senator Murphy said. “We are the land of the free because of the brave and there is no task too small when it comes to caring for our Veterans.”

The Veterans were served family-style a menu featuring creamed chip beef on toast (aka S.O.S.), Chicken Marsala, and smoked ham. A trio of singers from the USO provided live entertainment and the American Veterans Historical Museum set up exhibits and displayed several military vehicles.

“The sacrifices that our Veterans - and their families - make on our behalf are innumerable and we need to take every opportunity that we can to remind them that they have an incredibly grateful community behind them,” Senator Serino said. “The Chow Down is our way of bringing out vets together, showing our appreciation and recognizing them for all that they do in our community. Thank you to everyone who helped to make it a tremendous success.”

Dozens of volunteers welcomed the Veterans and served the meal.

“It is our honor today to serve our Veterans, who served our country and protected our freedoms,” Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell said. “I also want to thank all of the volunteers - the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, high school and middle school students as well as adults, who worked alongside us to make today possible. On behalf of Senator Murphy and Senator Serino and the PFC Joseph Dwyer Vet2Vet Program and thanking all of our Veterans and their families a happy and safe holiday season.”

The cornerstone portion of the event was built around the Vet2Vet Program, which is run by Putnam County’s Veterans Service Agency. It provides a place for peers (fellow Veterans, members of the Armed Forces and their families) to connect with and support one another in a safe and nonjudgmental environment. It is a free, anonymous and confidential program that provides support, lunch-and-learn workshops, mentoring opportunities as well as training and development options.

Reports continue to show service members returning from active duty are at an increased risk of PTSD. Statistics from the Federal Government indicate nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans suffer from PTSD, which is double the rate from Operation Desert Storm. In addition, there is an ongoing effort to reduce the suicide rate of veterans, which currently stands at a staggering rate of 22 every day.

“Today was a homerun,” said Karl Rohde, Director of Putnam County Veterans Service Agency. “There were smiles on everyone’s face. The veterans were proud to be here and proud to be veterans. They loved the food and the entertainment from the USO. Thank you to County Executive Odell, Senators Murphy and Serino for always supporting the Veterans and with the PFC Joseph Dwyer Vet2Vet Program to make this event possible.”

The event was warmly received by the Veterans guests.

“It was an incredible event,” said Veteran Earl Gunderson of Phillipstown. The food was delicious and it was great to sit at the table and some old stories.”

Veteran Nick Mucciarone of Mahopac agreed. “Today was wonderful, it could not have been better. It was a beautiful affair and we really appreciate it.”
Putnam Clerk Encourages Vets to Participate in Return the F.A.V.O.R

As the county prepares to celebrate Veterans Day, Putnam County Clerk Michael Bartolotti reminds Putnam residents, who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces, to participate in the Return the F.A.V.O.R. Discount Program to get year-round savings as a small token of appreciation.

“Putnam County has always been a very patriotic community and I am thrilled to be able to continue this program which allows my office and the local merchants a way to say thank you to our Veterans every day,” said County Clerk Bartolotti. “The merchants are all eager to ‘Return the Favor’ and give thanks for all the sacrifices you have made to guarantee our freedom and safety.”

The Return the F.A.V.O.R. (Find & Assist Vets of Record) Discount Program entitles Veterans to hundreds of discounts on merchandise and services throughout Putnam County.

“You cannot put a dollar amount on what we, as a society, owe our Veterans,” said Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell. “What we can do is take every opportunity we have to show our gratitude. I support the County Clerk’s Return the Favor program and encourage all of the Veterans to use it. It can save you money on meals, home heating and other services as well as on rounds of golf at Putnam County Golf Course.”

Veterans who file their DD214s at the Putnam County Clerk’s Office are issued a Putnam County Veteran ID card that enables them to take advantage of discounts offered by local merchants.

“Filling the DD214 with the County Clerk’s Office is an important thing for Veterans to do,” said Bartolotti. “By my office keeping it on file you do not have to worry about losing it. It is an essential document required for many Veterans services. The Return the F.A.V.O.R program is a bonus.”

Putnam County’s Return the F.A.V.O.R. program is a wonderful way to help and honor our Veterans at the same time,” said Art Hanley, chairman of the Putnam County Joint Veterans Council. “Participating Veterans are assured that they will always be able to find a copy of their DD214 and the ID card they are issued is good for discounts from merchants throughout the county who wish to say thank you for your service.”

A list of the participating merchants and the discount offered is available on the County Clerk’s website, putnamcounnty.com/county-clerk, along with the program’s rules and conditions.

“The program’s success is dependent not only on the participation of our Veterans, but also our local merchants,” said Bartolotti. “As such we strongly suggest every Putnam County business to enroll as a participating merchant.”

Merchants who are interested in participating in the Return the F.A.V.O.R program can find applications to join there as well.

For more information, visit putnamcounnty.com/county-clerk or call (845) 808-1142 x 49301.
Nearly 500 veterans and their families will be attending the 5th Annual Veterans Thanksgiving Dinner on November 21st at Putnam County Golf Course. Organizers are now asking for your help to make this event another great success. They are still seeking donations of turkeys (must be over 20 pounds) or supermarket gift cards for the event. The Lou Cardillo Home Selling Team is teaming up with the Purple Heart Homes New York Downstate Chapter, Carmel Town Councilwoman Suzi McDonough and Black Stone Texas to continue the 5th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner, originally started by former senator Greg Ball. If you would like to donate a turkey please contact Suzi McDonough at suzi5mcdonough@gmail.com or (914) 403-8463.
Thanks to All Our Veterans for Their Heroic and Selfless Service

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