



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Recognizes Yorktown's Barbara Wilkens as a 2024 Woman of Distinction Honoree

PETE HARCKHAM May 15, 2024

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State Sen. Pete Harckham with Barbara Wilkens at the 2024 State Senate Woman of Distinction ceremony at the State Capitol

Volunteer Ambulance Corps Co-Founder, Former Town Trustee and Local Farmer

Albany, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham recognized Barbara Wilkens, a dedicated community leader, local farmer and founding member of the Yorktown Volunteer Ambulance Corps, as a 2024 State Senate Woman of Distinction honoree at a special

ceremony this week at the State Capitol.

“Barbara Wilkens has dedicated her entire adult life to public service and bettering the community of Yorktown—and beyond,” said Harckham. “Through her lead-by-example attitude and tireless efforts, she has transcended her responsibilities and roles with various organizations to show us all just how much you can do in a day. Barbara is truly a ‘woman of distinction,’ and I congratulate her on being honored as such.”

A Yorktown native, Wilkens graduated as valedictorian from Yorktown High School in 1949. The following year she learned to fly as a member of the United States Civil Air Patrol. After receiving her bachelor’s degree in architecture and design from the University of Michigan, Wilkens then returned to Yorktown and taught art in the public schools.

Beginning in the late-1950s, Wilkens and her husband Johnny owned and operated Wilkens Fruit & Fir Farm in Yorktown. In 1968, they expanded to include a “pick-your-own” operation in the orchard; and in the early-1970s planted the first Christmas trees for a “cut-your-own” operation at the farm. School tours in the fall were added as well to provide a farm experience for thousands of children in the area. The farm has since celebrated its 107th anniversary and provides food donations to many local pantries.

Wilkens was a founding member of the Yorktown Volunteer Ambulance Corps in 1963, and served as a Red Cross first aid volunteer on the first ambulance and eventually was trained as one of the first emergency medical technicians for the corps. She retired from active service as a life member after 44 years.

As a member of the Yorktown Town Board from 1978 through 1989, the last four as Deputy Town Supervisor, Wilkens was an instrumental participant on many local projects, including the construction of the Town Court, expansion of the John C. Hart Memorial Library,

construction of the Jefferson Valley Mall and purchase of the property for what is now the Albert A. Capellini Community & Cultural Center. Wilkens chaired the town's Bicentennial Committee in 1988, and also helped form the town's Board of Ethics and, most importantly, helped draft the town's first comprehensive master plan.

Wilkens served on the New York City Watershed Agricultural Council for 17 years, and also was founding chair of the Westchester County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, formed to protect the watershed through environmentally sound practices. Additionally, she served on the Board of Directors of the Yorktown Land Trust and as a board member of the Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York.

Formerly one of the ruling elders of the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown, Wilkens has been an active congregant at the church since 1941.