



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Virginia Houseknecht of Watkins Glen to be honored as a "Woman of Distinction" in Albany later today

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 14, 2012



Albany, N.Y., May 15—In Albany on Tuesday, State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats) and his Senate colleagues will pay tribute to Virginia "Ginny" Houseknecht of Watkins Glen, a long-time area Cornell Cooperative Extension educator and leader, and founder of the Southern Tier Parkinson's Disease Support Group, as a 2012 New York State Senate "Woman of Distinction."

The Senate's "Women of Distinction" program, which began in March to coincide with Women's History Month in New York State, allows senators statewide to select one honoree from their respective legislative districts for this distinguished, statewide tribute.

O'Mara selected Houseknecht as this year's honoree following her nomination by Barbara Hubbell, Director of Community Solutions for the United Way of the Southern Tier.

"Ginny's decades-long career as a Cornell Cooperative Extension educator and leader is remarkable enough. She made an enormous difference in thousands of lives," said O'Mara, whose legislative district encompasses Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County (the city and town of Ithaca, and the towns of Enfield, Newfield, and Ulysses). "But since 2005, her response to Parkinson's disease has been inspirational and a true testament to her personal strength, perseverance and an undeniable, lifelong commitment to reaching out to others and building supportive communities. The Southern Tier Parkinson's Disease Support Group is a lifesaver and a singular achievement."

Hubbell said, "Ginny has always been a distinguished business professional and respected authority in her field. Not surprisingly, to those who know her, the overwhelming effects of Parkinson's disease have not dampened her spirit or desire to improve the lives of individuals and families in Schuyler County."

For 35 years until her retirement in 2005, Houseknecht served as the Family and Consumer Sciences Program Leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County. She is known across the Southern Tier for her leadership and research-based education in food sciences, nutrition and health, parenting, and financial management.

Shortly after her retirement, Houseknecht was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease (PD). Devastated, yet wanting to do something positive to help others, in 2006 she established the Southern Tier Parkinson's Disease Support Group with the endorsement and strong support of the Schuyler County Office for the Aging and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Her motivation to help others has led to the success of this critical support organization, which now provides accurate information, with guest speakers and a resource library, binding relationships, and a strong support network for those in need.

O'Mara noted that since the creation of the Southern Tier Parkinson's Disease Support Group six years ago, more than 100 area persons with PD and their caregivers have benefitted from Houseknecht's work as founder and facilitator of the organization.

Houseknecht will represent O'Mara's 53rd Senate District and join honorees from across New York at the Senate's 15th annual "Women of Distinction" tribute on Tuesday, May 15, 2012. The awards ceremony and reception will be held in the Legislative Office Building, where Houseknecht's biography and photo will be displayed as part of a special Senate exhibit.

[Listen to more on [Finger Lakes Radio](#)]

Following is the biography of Houseknecht that accompanies her "Woman of Distinction" award:

Virginia Houseknecht, affectionately known as "Ginny," has been a devoted community educator throughout her career and her retirement.

For 35 years, Ms. Houseknecht served as the Family and Consumer Sciences Program Leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County. She is known across the Southern Tier for her leadership and research-based education in food sciences, nutrition and health, parenting, and financial management.

Shortly after her retirement in 2005, Ms. Houseknecht was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease (PD). Devastated, yet wanting to do something positive to help others, she contacted Schuylers County Office for Aging and RSVP. With their endorsement and tremendous support, Ms. Houseknecht established the Southern Tier Parkinson's Disease Support Group in 2006. Her motivation to help others alongside her ability to easily connect and build a rapport have led to the success of a service that now provides accurate information, with guest speakers and a resource library, binding relationships, and a strong support network for those in need. Since its creation, more than 100 persons with PD and their caregivers have benefitted from Ms. Houseknecht's work as founder and facilitator of the group.

Among her other honors, Ms. Houseknecht is a recipient of the Jefferson Award for Public Service, the Schuylers Senior Volunteer of the Year, and Friend of Extension awards. She is a member of the League of Women Voters, and the Southern Tier Library System Foundation's campaign committee.

She has a BS degree from the College of Human Development, Penn State University and an MS degree from the College of Human Ecology, Cornell University.

Ms. Houseknecht lives in Watkins Glen. She and her late husband (Lee) are proud parents of their daughter, Ashley.