



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patrick M. Gallivan

Senator Gallivan Presents Springville Woman WITH Prestigious Award

PATRICK M. GALLIVAN May 9, 2013



Karen O'Hara Honored By State Senate As "Woman Of Distinction"

Senator Patrick M. Gallivan (R,C,I – Elma) honored Karen O'Hara of Springville on Tuesday with one of the New York State Senate's highest honors, recognizing her as a contemporary "Woman of Distinction" for her efforts to confront the global epidemic of human trafficking, her charitable activities and devotion to her Western New York community.

“Karen is a renaissance woman in the truest sense of the word; a special person who is always looking for new ways to apply her unique talents to make the world around her a better place to live,” Senator Gallivan said. “As a mother, Karen volunteers with local athletic organizations; as an entrepreneur, Karen is a leading voice to ensure the business community of Springville has every opportunity to succeed and grow; and as a woman, Karen has dedicated her life to ending the brutal practice of human trafficking and providing services and stability to its victims. We are fortunate that Karen has chosen to make New York State and Western New York her home and I extend my sincerest congratulations to her.”

“Human trafficking enslaves an estimated 27 million people worldwide. Unfortunately, the United States and our citizens are not exempt from these numbers. Human trafficking affects over 300,000 women and children across our country and with only a handful of shelters available to help the victims, I felt that doing something in Western New York to help was needed. That is why United Hands of Hope House is so important and will provide the survivors with the services that they need and a "safe" place for them to heal,” said Karen O’Hara. “I am so honored and humbled to have been selected as a "Woman of Distinction" by Senator Gallivan. His recognition and support of me along with all of the hard work that has been put into raising awareness in the hopes of eradicating human trafficking and building United Hands of Hope House, which is Western New York's first safe house, truly is an inspiration of hope for the survivors of human trafficking.”

After studying business and marketing at Pennsylvania College of Technology, Karen’s career took her around the country. In 1997, she returned to Western New York and opened one of the largest antique co-ops in the region, SouthTowns Rte 219 Antiques. Karen is a former director of Springville Area Chamber of Commerce and has immersed herself in projects critical to the economic future of Southern Erie County.

Karen is a former Mrs. New York, representing her home state in the Mrs. America competition, a televised event that celebrates the most accomplished married woman in the United States. Karen has used the publicity from the Mrs. New York competition and her designation as Mrs. New York International 2013 to bring awareness and resources to a cause very dear to her – human trafficking. Karen has traveled extensively speaking on the subject and is the Founder and Chairman of United Hands of Hope House, a non-profit corporation that provides recovery services to domestic survivors of human trafficking within the 17 counties of the western portion of New York State. This record of advocacy has garnered Karen and her cause significant notoriety. She was recently named an Ambassador of Hope for Shared Hope International, has been presented with New York State Senate Legislative Resolution recognizing her efforts on behalf of trafficking victims by State Senator Patrick M. Gallivan of Elma and State Senator John DeFranciso of Syracuse, and has been honored with a day named in her tribute in the City of Buffalo by Mayor Byron Brown.

Every year, each of New York's 63 state senators nominate one individual from their district as a "Contemporary Woman of Distinction" to be enshrined alongside the many historical women whose contributions continue to impact and shape modern-day New York State. Some of these trailblazing females include; Susan B. Anthony, Lucille Ball, Harriet Tubman, and Emma Willard, among others, all with strong links to New York State.

"Honoring and recognizing contemporary women like Karen O'Hara showcases the direct connection between New York State's pioneering women of yesterday with their modern counterparts, whose contributions continue to enrich New York State's quality of life," Gallivan said.

Senator Gallivan presented Karen with the "Woman of Distinction" award at a special ceremony on the floor of the State Senate in Albany on Tuesday, May 7, 2013.

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Photo Credit: New York State Senate