



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

## Senator Grisanti Names Joseph Ruzala ‘Veterans Hall of Fame’ 2014 Inductee

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New York State Senator Mark Grisanti (R, I-60) today announced that Joseph Ruzala of Hamburg was honored in Albany this week, as part of a ceremony that recognizes military veterans of New York being named to this year's class of the New York State Senate's Veterans Hall Of Fame.

“I am thrilled to honor Joe based on his dedication and hard work in our community,” said Senator Grisanti.” Joe is a role model and I am proud to nominate him for this honor because of the many contributions he has made and continues to make in the community. I gladly acknowledge the work that he has done as we celebrate our military veterans in New York State.”

On a particular distressing night while under attack as a young 25th Infantry Division soldier in Vietnam, Ruzala wondered if he would make it home alive and if he made it home what his life would become. Nearly 40 years later, he is making a difference in Western New York. Following his retirement from a local company, he began volunteering with veteran service organizations, wanting to do something to help veterans of all generations.

Ruzala saw opportunities while volunteering and began to facilitate relationships among community members and military veterans who are in need. He participated with other Vietnam veterans with their group “Pathfinders” that collaborated with the Department of Veteran Affairs on highly successful outreach events. From these events he would individually often follow up with community partners bringing veterans in need to their services, particularly veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

With each veteran he was able to assist his fire and motivation to help increased. He has become an indispensable volunteer of the Department of Veteran Affairs, Buffalo Vet Center, where he attends numerous outreach events and provides much mentorship for veterans in a kind, caring, and compassionate manner that is well received.

After Vietnam Ruzala found much comfort from his pets and knowing this had an idea to get OIF/OEF and other veterans coping with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder paired up with supportive animals. From this idea, he and others, partnered with local SPCA and today created a program called “Dog Tags Niagara.” Veterans and staff work with each other to emotionally heal wounded animals that in turn provides much healing for the veterans in return.

Wherever there is an event, no matter how large, or small, if it pertains to assisting veterans you will easily find Ruzala where his energy and true care for others shines brightly. Far away and long from the battlefields of Vietnam, Ruzala can be proud of the life he has lived and is a true inspiration to all that know and work with him.