



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Local small business owner being honored by Senator O'Mara at the Capitol today as a 2015 'Woman of Distinction' ~ Linda Thomas, longtime owner of the Wellsburg Diner, will be honored by Senate in statewide tribute during National Small Business Week

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 28, 2015



Albany, N.Y., May 5—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats) and his colleagues later today will honor Linda Thomas, longtime owner and operator of the Wellsburg Diner in the village of Wellsburg, New York (Chemung County), as a 2015 “Woman of Distinction.”

O'Mara selected Thomas to represent his 58th Senate District at the Senate's 18th Annual “Women of Distinction” awards ceremony in Albany this evening. At the annual statewide tribute in the Legislative Office Building, Thomas will be recognized along with more than 60

other honorees representing senatorial districts from across New York State.

O'Mara noted that this year's ceremony is being held during [National Small Business Week](#) (May 4-8, 2015), which he said makes his tribute to Thomas even more timely and fitting. O'Mara said that it was also recently announced that the Wellsburg Diner has been selected for a prestigious "Small Business Excellence Award" from the U.S. Small Business Administration. .

Thomas has owned and operated the [Wellsburg Diner](#) since 1997. The diner was destroyed by severe flooding from Tropical Storm Lee in September 2011. In the aftermath of the storm Thomas, despite daunting financial and personal hardships, vowed to reopen.

"This town's been very good to me, and the people in this town have been very good to me, and I wanted to stay with them," Thomas told the *Elmira Star-Gazette* in late February 2012 shortly before, with the help of the community, the Wellsburg Diner reopened just a block away from its original site. "The Wellsburg Diner is more than a building. It's a family."

O'Mara said that the new Wellsburg Diner has become a focal point of community life in the village and surrounding communities and has expanded to employ nearly 20 local workers. Since the flood, Linda has hosted meetings and events at the diner to help address numerous community concerns, as well as to support local activities and organizations including the animal protection agencies "A Voice for All Animals and "The Second Chance Ranch."

"Linda Thomas exemplifies persevering through tough times, lending a helping hand to those around you, and commitment to community. She's proof that our small town traditions and values are alive and well," said O'Mara. "No one has done more for her community's hope, pride and spirit. As a job creator and a lifeline of community action and support, Linda exemplifies everything this nation celebrates during National Small Business Week. The Wellsburg Diner is truly a small business making a big, big difference."

O'Mara said that Thomas was nominated for this year's award by Sherri Arnold, Regional Director of the Corning Community College Small Business Development Center.

Arnold said, "The Corning Community College's Small Business Development Center is here to assist small business owners to create and manage their small business, but we don't have any control over a person's work ethic or integrity. That's why working with Linda Thomas was an honor – because she had the incredible determination to rebuild her business in a small community where her diner was the focal point. She felt a responsibility to both her employees and her community to resurrect her diner after a flood that would have completely demotivated most people to return to business ownership. She is truly a local

hero and role model.”

Wellsburg Mayor Malcolm Coles, who was also instrumental in helping reopen the Wellsburg Diner after the flooding, stressed the establishment’s importance to the village and surrounding communities.

Coles said, “I have known Linda my whole life. Over the years we have grown to be great friends. She is a very selfless, caring person. She has always welcomed residents to the diner for a homemade meal, a cup of coffee and a place to socialize. I felt it was critical after the flooding in September 2011 to have the diner up and running to give the residents a place to go where they felt some normalcy after this devastating flood.”

The Senate's annual "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

[Read more in the *Elmira Star-Gazette*, "[Wellsburg Diner owner receives Senate award](#)" and attached below in *The Leader* and the *Evening Tribune*]

O’Mara’s past honorees have been:

-- in 2011, [Carol Berry of Hornell](#), a longstanding regional library professional and director of the Dormann Library in Bath;

-- in 2012, [Virginia “Ginny” Houseknecht of Watkins Glen](#), a longtime area Cornell Cooperative Extension educator and leader, and founder of the Southern Tier Parkinson’s Disease Support Group;

-- in 2013, [Beverly “Bev” Stamp](#), co-owner and operator of Lakewood Vineyards in Watkins Glen, a long-time and beloved ambassador of New York State’s nationally and internationally renowned wine and grape industry; and

-- last year, [Lauren R. Snyder](#), a public health professional from Penn Yan who served as the Yates County Public Health Director for 28 years before retiring in 2009.

Following is the biography that will accompany Thomas’ “Woman of Distinction” award:

A successful small business is often the backbone, and the heart and soul of a small community. Nowhere has this been more exemplified than in the rural village of Wellsburg, New York, where Linda Thomas has owned and operated the Wellsburg Diner since 1997.

In September 2011, Tropical Storm Lee swept across New York's Southern Tier and caused once-in-a-lifetime flooding in many municipalities, including in Wellsburg which was devastated and where the Wellsburg Diner was completely destroyed.

Linda Thomas, faced with daunting financial and personal hardships, vowed to reopen her place of business, saying, "This town's been very good to me, I wanted to stay with them...The Wellsburg Diner is more than a building. It's a family."

Local citizens and community leaders rallied around Linda and in early 2012 the Wellsburg Diner reopened just a block away from its original site in a larger, more accommodating space which has now become a center of community life – a place to have a great meal and find a friendly face, to share a few laughs and gather in support of community benefits, challenges and concerns such as "A Voice for Animals" and "The Second Chance Ranch."

Over the past several years, the Wellsburg Diner, under Linda's steadfast guidance, has beat the odds and continued to expand. Linda now provides good jobs for nearly 20 local workers in a small community with a shattered local economy.

In 2013, Linda and her Wellsburg Diner were honored by the Elmira Star-Gazette with a "Best of the Twin Tiers Award." The Wellsburg Diner has recently been selected for a prestigious "Small Business Excellence Award" from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Linda Thomas has spent a lifetime working in the local restaurant and hospitality industry. But at the Wellsburg Diner for nearly two decades, she's built much more than a successful, thriving small business: she's opened the doors to community hope, pride and spirit.