



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Martin J. Golden

## Katherine Ragazzino

MARTIN J. GOLDEN May 19, 2015



Katherine Ragazzino

**Award:** Honoring Our Veterans

**Year:** 2015

United States Marine Corps

Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Katherine Ragazzino joined the Marines 18 months after graduating high school. She initially worked in Administration, but became a Marine Corps Martial Arts Instructor, proficient in both lethal and non-lethal tactics, who trained and deployed with Special Operation Capable Units. Ms. Ragazzino also became a Camp Pendleton Range Inspector.

Ms. Ragazzino was deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq and Kuwait. While in Iraq in 2004, she sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) that dramatically affected her life. Though she did her best to overcome both cognitive and physical impairments, Ms. Ragazzino's injury proved to be serious and long-lasting.

In December 2007, Ms. Ragazzino was transferred to the Naval Medical Center in San Diego. At Balboa Hospital, she was placed in the Comprehensive Combat Casualty Care Center (C5) to help her with the brain injury and post-traumatic stress. For a year and a half, Ms. Ragazzino lived on hospital grounds with injured Marines and other service members as she received daily treatment. In June 2009, she was Honorably Discharged and Medically Retired from the Marines.

While Ms. Ragazzino was receiving treatment at the Naval Medical Center, the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund Organization reached out to her; she became a core member on Team Semper Fi and was given the opportunity to go on an expedition to Nepal in 2010 with Soldiers To Summits. This amazing opportunity changed her life in a spiritual way that she had never felt before. This journey of change was filmed, and the documentary "High Ground" was released in early 2012.

Upon her return, many ongoing circumstances lead Katherine and her service dog to become homeless for close to a year. She lived in her car with her dog, Daisy. It is because of the Semper Fi Fund and their supporters, however, that she is thriving today. While with the Semper Fi Fund, she was introduced to Friends of Firefighters, who became her host organization, through The Mission Continues.

Friends of Firefighters is dedicated to addressing the physical, mental health and wellness needs of New York City's firefighters and their families. Their ongoing mission is to provide long-term support and services through confidential counseling, wellness services and other assistance required by firefighters and their families. Ms. Ragazzino opens the door to further awareness and bridges the two communities of military and civilian together, making mental health services more palatable and, therefore, more accessible to the firefighters.