



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Senator Helming Announces 16 Nominees for Senate Woman of Distinction

SENATOR PAM HELMING April 2, 2018

GENEVA – Senator Pam Helming today announced the 16 nominees for New York State Senate Woman of Distinction recognition from the Wayne-Finger Lakes region. This award recognizes the outstanding work of extraordinary women from our region and throughout New York State, with one honoree selected from each State Senate District.

“Our community is fortunate to have so many remarkable women whose lives, career work, and volunteer service have contributed to making our state and country better, making our families stronger, and serving as examples to others. The Woman of Distinction program provides a terrific opportunity to recognize women from our area who make a difference and to thank them for the pride they bring to our communities. I received many fantastic nominations of worthy women from across my six-county district, and I look forward to recognizing all of these nominees,” Senator Helming said.

The 16 nominees are:

- **Cathleen Bement, of Canandaigua**, an IT specialist at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center and former police officer who volunteers with the Canandaigua Emergency Squad and the Canandaigua Fire Department and is the only woman to attain the rank of assistant fire chief in the department;

- **Cheri Roloson, of Williamson**, an animal advocate who started Cracker Jack Palace Farm to rescue abused, neglected, and unwanted horses and farm animals and provide at-risk teenagers with work experience on the farm;
- **Connie Patti, of Union Springs**, a registered nurse who volunteers with Perform4Purpose and Guiding Eyes for the Blind;
- **Donna Besler Tatem, of Canandaigua**, the CareNet Pregnancy Center Executive Director and community volunteer who facilitates the Survivors of Suicide Group and Talk Saves Lives to counsel adolescents who are struggling and help people learn about the risks and warning signs of suicide;
- **Ellen Hughes, of Waterloo**, a career educator and community volunteer who works with the Seneca County Action Agency, the United Way of Seneca County's Women's Leadership Council, and Literacy Volunteers of Seneca County;
- **Julie Bellone, of Waterloo**, a physical therapist and business owner who serves as a Seneca-Yates Red Cross board member, a member of the trauma response assistance for children group, and who deployed after Sept. 11 and after Hurricane Katrina to provide disaster assistance to first responders and victims;
- **Lauren Moore, of Canandaigua**, the Pioneer Library System Executive Director who dedicates her time to Rochester Refugee Relocation Services Inc. and supports a family who arrived in the community after their home in Aleppo, Syria was bombed;
- **Laurie Crane, of Huron**, the Huron Town Supervisor who has represented her town and surrounding towns well on issues related to the Lake Ontario flooding disaster and a community volunteer and advocate with several local organizations;
- **Michelle Fridley, of Canandaigua**, a disability rights advocate and the reigning Miss Wheelchair New York who has helped to influence disability rights legislation and is a role model for other people with disabilities;

- **Neetu Chandak, of Seneca Falls**, a Cornell University senior who serves as Treasurer of the Network of Enlightened Women and uses her platform to raise awareness of ideological discrimination against conservative and moderate students on college campuses;
- **Oksana Fuller, of Canandaigua**, a longtime resident and community participant who has served on multiple committees and boards, including the Canandaigua Watershed Association, and been involved in numerous town projects and issues;
- **Sarah Lynn Grossman, of Palmyra**, an educator and accomplished athlete who volunteers at Advent Comfort Care, as an Eye to Eye mentor, and as a caring clown at Rochester General Hospital, as well as on several Habitat for Humanity builds and on the Buddy Cruise each fall with individuals with disabilities and their families;
- **Valerie Aarne Grossman, of Palmyra**, a nurse who has worked in emergency nursing, pediatric telephone triage, critical care, and radiology and a gifted writer who has been published in numerous books, articles, and online courses;
- **Tricia Kuntz, of Palmyra**, the creator and owner of the regionally- and nationally-known business The Purple Painted Lady who hosts a festival each year that draws thousands of artists and guests and raises tens of thousands of dollars for local charities;
- **Marie Milligan, of Geneva**, the business manager of Our Lady of Peace Parish who works tirelessly to support the Catholic church and the Geneva community as a whole, serving as the farmer's market nutrition program administrator for 25 years and volunteering with numerous community groups;
- **Patricia White, of Scipio Center**, a former music educator in the Southern Cayuga School District and Music Technology Chair for the New York State School Music Association who serves as the organist and choir director of the Scipioville Presbyterian Church and Vice President of the Howland Stone Store Museum.

Senator Helming will honor these 16 women during a ceremony that will take place on Friday, April 20 at the New York Wine and Culinary Center in Canandaigua. The ceremony will include their nominators and other guests. Donna Schaertl, of Shortsville, whom Senator Helming selected as last year's Woman of Distinction from the 54th District, will serve as the featured speaker for the event. Ms. Schaertl works with a variety of causes in her community, such as the local Blue Star Mothers, the Canandaigua VA Medical Center, the Red Jacket Fire Department, the Ontario County Safety Council, and the Ontario County Police Benevolent Association. She supports deployed service members and their families, organizes Autism Awareness Month events, and teaches fire prevention and personal protection programs at the Manchester-Shortsville Central School District, among contributions to other causes and organizations.

At the event, Senator Helming will announce her selection for the Woman of Distinction honoree from the Wayne-Finger Lakes region. That woman will join the other Woman of Distinction honorees from throughout the state at a ceremony hosted by the State Senate in May at the State Capitol in Albany. The honoree's photo and biography will become part of a special exhibit celebrating the contributions of these outstanding New York women. The exhibit will be on display in Albany at the Legislative Office Building. Senator Helming will also offer an online Woman of Distinction exhibit through her website.

"Though I can select just one woman to represent the Wayne-Finger Lakes region as this year's Woman of Distinction honoree at the Albany ceremony, all 16 of these nominees truly deserve to be recognized for their outstanding accomplishments and contributions to their communities. That is why I am holding my own ceremony to salute all of the nominees, so that all of them know that we value their commitment to their communities, workplaces, and families and that we appreciate their service. It will surely be a great event for the nominees and their nominators," Senator Helming said.