



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara salutes the service of a local WWII Navy veteran: The late Paul C. 'Digger' Vendetti of Horseheads inducted into the NYS Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame (UPDATED: View the 2019 Hall of Fame inductees)

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 23, 2019

| ISSUE: **VETERANS HALL OF FAME**



The Senate established its online Veterans' Hall of Fame in 2005 and, including this year, has inducted more than 400 veterans. The Hall salutes New York veterans for their service in the United States Armed Forces and their civilian accomplishments.

Elmira, N.Y., May 21—Approaching this year’s Memorial Day observances across the state and nation, State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) on Tuesday saluted the service of a local World War II United States Navy veteran, the late Paul C. “Digger” Vendetti – an Elmira native and longtime caretaker at **Woodlawn National Cemetery** -- by inducting him into the New York State Senate Veterans’ Hall of Fame.

Tuesday’s formal induction took place at a ceremony in Hearing Room B of the Legislative Office Building in Albany, where Vendetti was recognized along with more than 60 other veterans from throughout the state inducted into the Hall of Fame this year. Senators select one inductee annually from their respective legislative districts. O’Mara selected Vendetti from among nominations he received from throughout his 58th Senate District.

[An archived video of today's full induction ceremony in Albany will be **HERE** when it becomes available]

The Senate established its online Veterans’ Hall of Fame in 2005 and, including this year, has inducted more than 400 veterans. The Hall salutes New York veterans for their service in the United States Armed Forces and their civilian accomplishments.

[View the New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame **HERE**]

O’Mara said, “It is my great privilege to help ensure that Paul Vendetti will be remembered for generations to come as one of New York State’s outstanding veterans. His induction into the Senate Veterans’ Hall of Fame salutes his life of service to our local community, our state, and the United States of America. He served our nation as part of the Greatest Generation and then came home to Chemung County where he devoted a life’s work to caring for the final resting places of thousands of his fellow veterans at Woodlawn National Cemetery. It was a life well lived, and Paul earned and deserves this tribute.”

O'Mara added that he has fond memories of Vendetti, whom he met on a few occasions over the years, the last time being at a Veterans Day ceremony at the Center Street Elementary School in Horseheads in **November 2017, where the district awarded Vendetti an official high school diploma as part of the state's Operation Recognition program.** Born in Elmira in 1926, Vendetti joined the United States Navy in 1944 before completing high school.

Susan Pirozzolo, Community Information Specialist at the **Horseheads Central School District,** nominated Vendetti for the Hall of Fame induction.

Pirozzolo said, "Our community is blessed with so many men and women who served our country selflessly, and when I saw that Senator O'Mara was seeking nominations, Paul Vendetti immediately came to my mind. Digger was such a special person with a wonderful outlook on life. It is a privilege to call him my friend. We were honored to present him with an official Horseheads High School diploma in 2017, making him a Horseheads Blue Raider for life."

Vendetti served in WWII as a U.S. Navy Seaman First Class in the South Pacific. He received numerous military awards including the Asiatic Pacific Medal, Philippine Liberation Ribbon, American Theater Medal, and the Victory Medal.

Honorably discharged from Navy service in 1946, Vendetti returned to the Elmira area, settled in Horseheads, and raised three children with his wife of 72 years, Rosemary.

He spent 40 years as a dedicated caretaker at Woodlawn National Cemetery where he proudly tended to the final resting places of thousands of his fellow veterans.

Vendetti was a member of American Legion Post #442 and a great fan of the New York Yankees. Family, friends, neighbors, and fellow veterans are quick to recall his always-ready sense of humor and unforgettable laugh.

Vendetti passed away last summer. He was buried in Woodlawn National Cemetery, with Military Honors, on August 30, 2018.

O'Mara's previous Veterans' Hall of Fame inductees were:

> in 2011, **Philip C. Smith**, a highly decorated Korean War combat veteran and well-known figure in Schuyler County government and veterans' affairs;

> in 2012, J. **Arthur "Archie" Kieffer**, a World War II combat veteran and a widely admired fixture in Chemung County government as the Chemung County historian;

> in 2013, Painted Post Mayor and World War II combat veteran **Roswell L. "Roz" Crozier, Jr.**;

> in 2014, **Anthony J. "Tony" Specchio, Sr.**, a distinguished Korean War veteran and widely respected for his long-standing and active service to veterans and government in Watkins Glen and throughout Schuyler County;

> in 2016, **P. Earle Gleason**, a lifelong Yates County resident and long-time director of the Yates County Veterans' Service Agency; and

> in 2018, **Warren A. Thompson**, a lifelong Steuben County resident and farmer, and a stalwart in the county's civic and veterans affairs.

Other area veterans who are Hall of Fame members are **Frank C. "Fritz" Pesesky**, a veteran of World War II and former director of the Chemung County Veterans Service Office (2005);

William K. Kastner, a Vietnam veteran and longtime director of the Steuben County Veterans Service Agency (2006); and **Robert Laskaris**, a highly decorated combat veteran and well-known figure in Chemung County veterans' affairs (2008).