



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Chris Jacobs

## Jacobs Honors 2020 Veterans Hall of Fame Inductee John "Jack" O'Connor

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(Buffalo, NY) – In a ceremony in front of the Vietnam Memorial at the Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park, New York State Senator Chris Jacobs recognized Village of Kenmore resident and long-time veterans advocate John “Jack” O’Connor as the 60<sup>th</sup> Senate District’s Veterans Hall of Fame inductee for 2020.

“Jack O’Connor served his country with great pride and distinction during a very turbulent time in our nation’s history,” said Senator Jacobs. “In the more than 40 years that has passed since the Vietnam War ended, he has applied that same dedication to a life of extraordinary service to his fellow veterans,” Jacobs added.

Mr. O’Connor served in the United States Army in Vietnam from 1968-1970, first with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and then with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Among his many commendations while there, he earned the Bronze Star, the National Defense Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, an Army Commendation Medal and a Combat Infantryman Badge.

After being honorably discharged in 1970, O’Connor spent 30 years as the Director of Medicaid Reform in the Erie County Department of Social Services. During that time, he advocated for and worked closely with many veterans, including many who found themselves homeless, connecting them with a wide variety of services.

O’Connor’s post-military career has been highlighted by the significant role he played along with City Court Judge Robert Russell in establishing the first Veterans Treatment Court in the nation here in Buffalo in 2008. The court aids veterans struggling with addiction and mental illness by providing mentoring services and diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system to programs and services to help them transition from active duty and rebuild their lives.

The court and mentoring services were so successful and had such a transformative impact on the lives of the veterans who were assisted by it that they became a national model for the more than 500 Veterans Treatment Courts around the country that followed. All told, Veterans Treatment Courts have helped prevent more than 40,000 veterans nationwide from entering the criminal justice system.

More than a decade after its founding, Mr. O'Connor remains an active volunteer, serving as a mentor to the court and his fellow veterans. He continues his advocacy and support of his fellow veterans as a proud member of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 77.

“The New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame was created to honor and recognize outstanding veterans from the Empire State who have distinguished themselves both in military and civilian life,” said Senator Jacobs. “Jack O'Connor’s meritorious service to our nation deserves the special recognition that only a Hall of Fame can provide, as a fitting expression of our gratitude and admiration, and I am very proud to recognize him today,” Jacobs concluded.