



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'MARA HONORING FOOD BANK OF THE SOUTHERN TIER LEADER AS 2021 STATE SENATE 'WOMAN OF DISTINCTION': Food Bank President and CEO Natasha Thompson represents region in NY Senate's annual tribute to women making a difference (WATCH CEREMONY AT NOON TODAY)

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 26, 2021

| ISSUE: **WOMEN OF DISTINCTION**



Natasha Thompson represents a remarkable commitment to our communities that highlights her recognition this year as a New York State "Woman of Distinction." For more than two decades, she has remained devoted to a life's work of serving those in need throughout the Southern Tier region and I am proud to pay this tribute to her contributions as a leader and a tireless advocate.

**Elmira, N.Y., August 23**—State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) is honoring Natasha Thompson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, as his 2021 New York State Senate “Woman of Distinction.”

Thompson will represent O’Mara’s 58th Senate District as part of the Senate’s 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual “Women of Distinction” celebration and join more than 60 other honorees representing state senatorial districts from throughout New York.

The Senate's annual recognition program, which began in March to coincide with Women's History Month, allows senators statewide to select one honoree from their respective legislative districts to be celebrated for their significant accomplishments, service, and contributions to the quality of life within and beyond their communities. Prior to COVID-19, honorees were recognized at an in-person awards ceremony and reception at the Legislative Office Building in Albany. Last year, the Senate honored its “Women of Distinction” through a virtual tribute.

The 2021 “Women of Distinction” will also be honored virtually on Thursday, August 26, to coincide with Women’s Equality Day. The virtual tribute (including Senator O’Mara’s personal tribute) will be available for viewing at Noon today at: <https://www.nysenate.gov/calendar/events/august-26-2021/august-26-women-distinction-ceremony>

O’Mara said, “Natasha Thompson represents a remarkable commitment to our communities that highlights her recognition this year as a New York State ‘Woman of Distinction.’ For more than two decades, she has remained devoted to a life’s work of serving those in need throughout the Southern Tier region and I am proud to pay this tribute to her contributions as a leader and a tireless advocate. Natasha’s trademark optimism, selflessness, and unwavering belief in the Food Bank’s mission have always stood out for so many of us, but her leadership guiding the work of the Food Bank throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has been an inspiring lifeline and an undeniable foundation of hope for residents and families across this region. I am truly pleased this year, on behalf of the 58th Senate District, to be able to extend this well-deserved and well-earned tribute of appreciation, gratitude, and respect. Thank you Natasha.”

Thompson has been with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier since 2001 and in her current position as President and CEO since 2008. She began her career as an Americorps\*VISTA volunteer at the Rhode Island Community Food Bank in 1997.

Under Thompson’s leadership, the Food Bank was recognized in 2017 with Feeding America’s prestigious “Food Bank of the Year” award.

In 2020, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier saw an unprecedented increase in demand for food due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many food banks across the nation, Thompson had to completely shift the Southern Tier's entire operation to respond quickly to fast-changing community needs while ensuring the safety of staff, volunteers, and clients. Thompson helped her team successfully navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic. The Food Bank of the Southern Tier ended the year with a record-breaking distribution of 17.6 million pounds of food, a 40% increase over 2019.

Thompson has worked with countless people throughout the Southern Tier who are committed to helping their neighbors and making their communities stronger. Since 2018, she has hosted Chasing the Dream, a local public affairs program on WSKG-TV which highlights stories of individuals and organizations who are working to make a difference.

Thompson holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology & Religion, and a Masters of Business Administration, both from the University of Rochester. She served as the Chair of Feeding New York State from 2016-2018 and was a member of Feeding America's National Council of Food Banks, representing the Eastern Region, from 2012-2016. She currently serves on the board of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County.

O'Mara's past "Women of Distinction" 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;

> in 2014, 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;

> in 2015, Linda Thomas, owner and operator of the Wellsburg Diner and recipient of a prestigious "Small Business Excellence Award" from the U.S. Small Business Administration;

> in 2016, Dawn R. Smith, Transition and Care Management (TCM) Program Manager at the Bath VA Medical Center and a well-known local veterans advocate;

> in 2017, Carmella Hoffmann, Owner and Operator of Sunset View Creamery in Odessa (Schuyler County);

> in 2018, Kathryn J. Boor, a native of Chemung County and the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CAL S) at Cornell University; and

> in 2019, Pauline “Polly” Holbrook, a longtime stalwart of civic affairs in the city of Hornell and the Canisteo Valley.