



**Office for
the Aging**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SIX VOLUNTEERS FROM HAMILTON, WARREN AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES HONORED FOR THEIR EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE ON OLDER NEW YORKERS' DAY

New York State Office for the Aging celebrates Older New Yorkers' Day with video presentation recognizing 90 honorees statewide for their service

Six exceptional community volunteers from Hamilton, Warren and Washington Counties were recently honored by the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) for their exceptional service to older adults and others in the community.

Terry Barber and **Joan Degener**, both of Fort Ann, **Thomas Dolan** and **Kathy Braico**, both of Queensbury, **Grace Morrison** and **Vincent Lauria**, both of Wells, were nominated by their county Area Office on Aging for recognition at NYSOFA's annual Older New Yorkers' Day celebration.

The virtual celebration premiered November 5 on social media, with a video presentation featuring approximately 90 honorees from around the state, along with remarks from state officials.

- Barber has always been concerned about public safety – in particular, ensuring that kids are protected from traffic dangers and other hazards. While teaching in the village of Fort Ann, he served as the safety chairman for the elementary school. Through his coaching, fifth-grade students petitioned the state to create a safer intersection on Route 149 and the state responded by installing a yellow caution light that undoubtedly prevented several accidents. More recently, his research and efforts were instrumental in reducing the Fort Ann village speed limit from 40 to 35 miles per hour.
- Dr. Kathy Braico has offered her expertise and talents to Warren County Public Health as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response by volunteering to provide vaccinations at numerous clinics. She remains actively engaged with the Public Health program as the pandemic continues and now impacts younger people. Dr. Braico practiced medicine as a pediatric doctor for almost 50 years, alongside her husband, Dr. John Braico. She continues to provide her expertise at Double H Ranch in Lake Luzerne, serving as its Medical Director. The camp serves children suffering from severe medical issues and allows them to experience the

things most people take for granted by ensuring the children can explore and interact with others in a safe and nurturing environment.

- In over 30 years of volunteerism, Degener has told the story of her community's history while also building a legacy of learning for its future by helping children gain the resources necessary to succeed. She is a founding member of the Fort Ann Historical Society. In that role, she helped research and write "Fort Ann: 300 Years of History." She also leads programs for elementary students at Fort Ann Central, introducing them to the library, and she helped develop the library's weekly play-and-learn program.
- Since joining the Boy Scouts in 1939, Dolan has provided many years of service through the organization, guiding scouts on long Adirondack canoe trips of up to 100 miles, participating in search-and-rescue missions for missing people in the Adirondacks, and more. He has been an active member of Christ Church since the 1940s. In addition to helping with numerous maintenance projects at the church, Dolan has participated in mission trips with the church to help repair people's homes. Dolan was also involved in the Telephone Pioneers volunteer network, and he fondly remembers helping to paint maps of the United States on local school playgrounds.
- Morrison leads a program that monitors and maintains gardens in the town of Wells' public spaces. She also launched a weekly craft program at the Wells Library, where individuals can learn to work on sewing, quilting, crocheting, and other needle activities. Using these talents, she has donated many quilts to local fundraisers while providing warmth and comfort to individuals in need.
- A 30-year veteran of the Wells Volunteer Fire Company, Lauria has served in all leadership roles and currently holds the position of chief. In addition to fire response and training, he helps residents in all emergencies, including floods, power outages, falls, and accidents. Lauria has also served as a driver with the volunteer ambulance corps, has been very involved in the maintenance and facilities management of a local church, participated in the northern Fulton and southern Hamilton County Knights of Columbus, and has lent his fire company experience to the Hamilton County Fire Advisory Board.

For a more detailed profile of each exceptional honoree, please see the award program book and get a link to NYSOFA's video presentation [on our Older New Yorkers' Day landing page](https://aging.ny.gov/older-new-yorkers-day-2021-epk) at <https://aging.ny.gov/older-new-yorkers-day-2021-epk>.

Deanna Park, Director of the Warren/Hamilton Counties Office for the Aging/NY Connects Program, said: "Although we appreciate all of our volunteers throughout the year, we are pleased to honor our 2021 Seniors of the Year Kathy Braico and Thomas Dolan of Warren County, as well as Vincent Lauria and Grace Morrison of Hamilton County. Senior volunteers contribute not just their time but their life experiences to local programs. From contributing at the Double H Ranch, to mentoring Boy Scouts, to being

active in the local fire company, to reading to our school children, these individuals are making a meaningful impact on our communities. Just imagine where we would be if we had more volunteers like Kathy, Tom, Vinnie and Grace. Thank you to each of them for their ongoing dedication and compassion.”

Gina Cantanucci-Mitchell, Executive Director of the Washington County Office for Aging and Disability Resource Center, said: “I am honored to know Joan Degener and Terry Barber on a personal level for the past several years. Outside of their remarkable personal stories, I can tell you that Mrs. Degener and Mr. Barber are both incredible individuals who always find ways to give back to their community and to others. I am always amazed to hear about their achievements, whether it be a small act of kindness or their actions towards a larger advocacy effort for positive change within our ‘small town’ community. They are truly committed to making Fort Ann a community versus merely a place to live — and that’s a testament to who they are as individuals. They are an inspiration not only to me, but to many others who have crossed their paths. They are the superheroes and a model for future generations to know and follow.”

New York State Office for the Aging Director Greg Olsen said: “Older adults contribute mightily to their communities. These individuals are a great reason why New York lives up to its designation as an age-friendly state – the first in the nation to receive this distinction. Older New Yorkers not only help their peers in the same age group, but also families and youths as well, with a level of voluntary contribution that is unmatched by any other demographic group. We are so proud to celebrate their incredible contributions. We thank them for their wisdom, their talents, their mentorship, and their service.”

Throughout New York State, over 935,000 individuals age 55 or older contribute approximately 495 million hours of service to their communities annually. This translates into an annual economic output of \$13.8 billion.

People over the age of 50 also account for the majority of volunteering, philanthropy, and donation activities in the U.S. Older New Yorkers and Baby Boomers make up 63 percent – \$379 billion – of all the household income generated in New York State, supporting local businesses and schools while contributing significantly to the local and state economy.

About the New York State Office for the Aging and Health Across All Policies/Age-Friendly New York

The New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) continuously works to help the state’s 4.3 million older adults be as independent as possible for as long as possible through advocacy, development and delivery of person-centered, consumer-oriented, and cost-effective policies, programs, and services that support and empower older adults and their families, in partnership with the network of public and private organizations that serve them.

New York is nationally recognized for being the first age-friendly state in the nation. Using the state's Prevention Agenda as the overarching framework, in 2017, New York launched a Health Across All Policies approach, where public and private partners work together to positively impact population health by marrying health care, preventive health, and community design, in concert with addressing social determinants of health, to improve the lives of all New Yorkers, young and old.

Stay connected—visit the NYSOFA Facebook page; follow @NYSAGING on Twitter and NYSAGING on Instagram; or visit aging.ny.gov.

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