



# 2022 OMBUDSMAN OF THE YEAR

## Barbara Thomas

Barbara Thomas has shown exceptional dedication as a volunteer for the New York State Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP). When the need arose, she was willing to cover facilities outside of her county and now travels more than an hour each way to fulfill her duties, covering both a nursing home and an adult home. In her four short years with LTCOP, Thomas has investigated over 300 complaints, made 301 facility visits, comprising 480 hours of service, in addition to nearly 168 hours of time spent travelling between locations and home. The residents in Thomas's two facilities look forward to her visits, as they know she will help them find a resolution to their concerns.



In addition to her work for LTCOP, Thomas has been an integral part of Special Olympics for over 40 years, coaching, cheering on, and encouraging each Olympian. "She is admired for her sheer love of her community and willingness to help wherever and whenever she can," says her nomination for Older New Yorkers' Day.

Barbara Thomas previously lived and taught special education and physical education in Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. She moved to Plattsburgh in 1981 when her teaching position was cut during the recession. She began working for Clinton County ARC and became an ombudsman soon after retiring in 2018.

"The ombudsman experience has been the perfect retirement volunteer gig for me," Thomas says. "Being able to advocate for the rights of people who are basically forgotten by most of the population is so important. It gives me such a great feeling when I am able to make even the smallest improvement in their lives. The demands on the time of the volunteer ombudsman are very manageable and leave time for your own recreation/ social and or other volunteer activities."