

Welcome Home Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemoration

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Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs honors Mr. Joe Toma with the Patriotic Volunteer and Appreciation Award

AURORA - Vietnam War Veterans were honored and thanked today for their service during the Vietnam War by the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Veterans at the Fox Valley Park District Prisco Center in Aurora, IL. During the ceremony Veterans were honored with a 50 year commemoration pin. This national commemoration was authorized by Congress, established under the Secretary of Defense, and launched by the

President as follows: In 2007, the 110th Congress incorporated language in H.R. 4986 authorizing the Secretary of Defense to conduct a program commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War.

The Commemoration honors all United States veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time between November 1, 1955 and May 15, 1975, regardless of location. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that today there are 7 million living Vietnam veterans and 9 million families of those who served in this time frame. We make no distinction between veterans who served in-country, in-theater, or who were stationed elsewhere during the Vietnam War period. All were called to serve and the overwhelming majority of these veterans served honorably and admirably.

After the Ceremony, IDVA Assistant Director Harry Sawyer named Mr. Joe Toma as the recipient of the Patriotic Volunteer and Appreciation Award for the Third Quarter, Fiscal Year 2017. The Illinois Veterans' Patriotic Volunteer and Appreciation Award high-lights and honors the work of Illinois veterans whose contributions in service to the veteran community and their local communities are truly above and beyond. Nominees are evaluated on the basis of their leadership, dedication, innovation, and impact in serving these communities. Award recipients are those whose efforts add to the powerful narrative that veterans are dedicated, Life-long servants whose efforts benefit all of Illinois veteran communities.

Mr. Toma volunteered for the United States Army in 1967. Mr. Toma served in Vietnam and was honorably discharged from the United States Army in 1970. He has continued to serve his community and his fellow veterans, exhibiting exemplary commitment through various veteran and volunteer activities. Mr. Toma conceived and has organized the Annual Vets Week with the City of Aurora' Veterans Advisory Council. (AVAC) Last year, through these many events, under Mr. Toma's leadership, the AVAC raised over \$40,000. Funds were used for scholarships for family members of Veterans and for a future program to offer service dogs for Veterans.

"Years ago, Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle once said: 'There's nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer.' That quote describes Mr. Toma and all of his volunteering activities in Aurora. He is very deserving of this high recognition," said IDVA Director Erica Jeffries.

The Illinois Veterans' Patriotic Business and Appreciation Award will be awarded quarterly from the nominations received. The business of the year will be selected from the four businesses awarded the Illinois Patriotic Business and Appreciation Award. The Business selected will be honored at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield, Illinois in August of each year.