

MOHAWK VALLEY
HOMETOWN HEROES
BANNER PROJECT

WEST WINFIELD NY



Compiled by: **Nicholas Thomas**

August 2025

Hometown Heroes

Barton Owen - First Sergeant of the U.S. Army

Decorations and recognitions:

Bronze Star (2)

Purple Heart (2)

Meritorious Service Medal (2)

Connection to West Winfield and Biography: Barton Owen is the proud father of two daughters who have attended and graduated from Mount Markham High School. After having been a tanker for twenty years Owen is now an active member of the American Legion and is currently living out his lifelong dream of being a farmer.

Jack R. Kilty - FT2 of the U.S. Navy

Decorations and Recognitions:

Good Conduct Medal

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Jack Kilty was born and raised in West Winfield, he has lived here for most of his life and is an active member of the community. Kilty served on the USS Yosemite and has kept in touch with his shipmates throughout the years; he prides himself on his past and present pride in being an American.

Submission by Wendy Kilty, daughter

Afred J. Smith Jr. - QM1 of the U.S. Navy (WWII)

Decorations and Recognitions:

Honorable Discharge

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Alfred Smith Jr. has been a lifelong resident of West Winfield, he has raised his family here and has run a family owned meat business and fur dealer. Smith has been and continues to be incredibly proud of his service and the United States of America.

Submission by Jean Lewis, daughter

Robert W. Little - U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Robert Little served in the United States Army from 1942-1946, a majority of this service having been spent in the Coast Artillery at Fort Monroe in Phoebus, Virginia.

After completion of his service Little returned to West Winfield with his wife and infant daughter, working with his father in law at Senif Sons Inc., achieving the role of Vice President before retiring. Little was an active member of his community, having been a member of the West Winfield Rotary Club, the Henry Hiteman Fire Company, and an active member of the American Legion among many other activities. Little passed away in September of 1986.

Submission by the family of Robert W. Little

Thomas S. Senif - EM3 of the U.S. Navy

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Thomas Senif was a lifelong resident of West Winfield, serving in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946. Senif attended Champlain College, graduating from Duquesne University with a BS in business.

Senif was an active member of his community, having owned LB Senif & Sons, been the Town of Winfield Supervisor, and a member of St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Senif passed away in 1998.

Damian Price - 1st Battalion 126th Aviation of the U.S. Army**Decorations and Recognitions:**

Army Commendation Medal

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Damian Price grew up in West Winfield and graduated from Mount Markham in 2000, serving in the U.S. Army from 2001-2009. Price attended Cobleskill College for culinary arts, and Johnson and Wales University, graduating from Johnson and Wales University with a BS in Culinary Arts and Nutrition.

Price is currently employed at SUNY Oneonta as the Executive Chef and lives in Cooperstown with his wife Alex, and two sons Anderson and Oliver. Price is an avid Minnesota Vikings fan.

Raymond F. Jones - Sergeant of the Army National Guard

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Raymond Jones served in the Korean War, he worked as an independent contractor in the area having built several homes, farms, and businesses.

After his service Jones moved on to work for the Town of West Winfield Highway Department as the Superintendent of Highways starting in 1976 and retiring in 1990. Jones lived in the village for many years on Water Street before building his home on Meeting House Road. Jones is incredibly proud of the service he has given his country, he believes that serving is the greatest thing a person can do to ensure freedom for all.

Jones doesn't speak much of his time in service, but he maintains that what he did for his country was right and just. Jones strongly believes that those who have served and sacrificed in the military have given the greatest gift to our country.

Submission by Alan Bard, grandson

Louis F. Cifarelli - Sergeant of the U.S. Army

Decorations and Recognitions:

Army of Occupation Medal

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Louis Cifarelli was raised in West Winfield with his family, attending school in West Winfield and graduating in 1949. After graduation Cifarelli entered the Army. His parents were both active members of the West Winfield community.

Submission by Mary Cifarelli, daughter

Henry Willems - Navy

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Henry Willems served in the U.S. Navy from 1942-1945. Willems was aboard the USS Santee in 1944 during the Battle of Leyte Gulf where they were hit with both a torpedo and a kamikaze plane.

Willems lived and worked in West Winfield for most of his life, working for the West Winfield and Mount Markham School Districts.

Submission by Penny Willems O'Malley, Pam Willems Drake, and Terry Willems

William Christian - U.S. Marine Corps

Decorations and Recognitions:

Rifle Expert

Sea Service Deployment Ribbon

Good Conduct Medal

Honorable Discharge

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: William Christian grew up in West Winfield and attended Mount Markham, where he was an avid wrestler. Christian joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1980 after completing boot camp at Parris Island, he then moved on to infantry training school at Camp Geiger.

Christian went on to Kane'ohe Bay in Hawaii and joined the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines. He participated in three Western Pacific Tours with the 31st Marine Expeditionary/Amphibious Unit. In 1982 he attended Marine Sniper School and was honorably discharged in 1984.

Submitted by Amanda VanDenbergh, daughter

David M. Rowe - U.S. Marine Corps

Decorations and Recognitions:

Good Conduct Medal

National Defence Ribbon

Cold War Ribbon

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: David Rowe moved to West Winfield in 1989 after purchasing a home here.

Jonathan Schlaepfer Jr. - PFC of the U.S. Army

Decorations and Recognitions:

Cavalry Spurs

Army Achievement Medal

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Jonathan Schlaepfer Jr. graduated from Mount Markham High School in 2023, immediately after he began pursuing his lifelong dream of becoming a soldier in the U.S. Army.

Schlaepfer completed his basic training and AIT at Fort Moore. Schlaepfer's AIT graduation was an incredibly important day for him as it was the same day his grandfather turned 70.

Schlaepfer's grandfather, who was in attendance, had the honor of placing his infantry cord on his shoulder, signifying his completion of AIT for infantry.

Schlaepfer continues to follow in the footsteps of not only his maternal grandfather, but also his three maternal uncles who have all served in the U.S. Army.

Submitted by Monica Schlaepfer, Dezirae Schaepfer, and Montana Wellenstein

Rick Sullivan - U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Rick Sullivan was born and raised in West Winfield. Sullivan has lived in West Winfield for his whole life and has raised his proud family here.

Submitted by Kylie Allan and Brianne Clark, daughters

Peter H. Smith - Sergeant of the U.S. Army

Decorations and Recognitions:

Mount Markham Central School Hall of Fame

Connections to the Community and Biography: Peter was born into the West Winfield Community in 1947 and with the exception of the time spent in the military, lived in West Winfield his entire life. He graduated from West Winfield Central School in 1965 and graduated from Hobart College in 1969.

He was a 35 year member of the West Winfield Fire Department and served as West Winfield Fire Chief for several years, as well as President of the Henry Hiteman Engine and Hose Company and Founder/Director of the 'Tanners' Drum and Bugle Corp. He was a nationally well-known Businessman operating Unadilla Valley Trading company as well as Unadilla Raw Furs and Hides, and served in leadership roles for many years in the New York State Trappers Association.

He was a Mentor to many young people teaching them about conservation and sharing his love of Nature and the Outdoors. He was invited on several occasions to participate in Conservation Day activities and was a co-author of the New York State Trappers Training Manual.

Peter was inducted into the Mount Markham Central School Hall of Fame posthumous for his dedication and commitment to the West Winfield Community for the many activities he was involved in.

Peter passed away in 2003 from Agent Orange Cancer that he contracted from his service time.

Submitted by Sandy Smith, Wife

Peter H. Crave - SSgt of the U.S. Marine Corps

Decorations and Recognitions:

Honorable Discharge

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Peter Crave served his country from April 1937 to February 1947. He served in the South Pacific during WWII, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign and the American Campaign.

After his honorable discharge, he met and married Eleanor Lorraine Quinn. He moved back to his childhood state of New York and raised his family in West Winfield. He was a business owner, running his family restaurant, The 1101 and later the local tavern, The Inn, with his son. He was Mayor of West Winfield from 1967-1971 and at the time of his death, he was the Commander of the George R Pritchard VFW, Post #2338. Crave was also an active member of St. Joseph's church, being the communicant.

Submitted by Kathleen Crave Land, daughter

Joseph Gibson - CSM of the U.S. Army

Decorations and Recognitions:

Bronze Star (2)

18 medals (misc.)

12 ribbons (misc.)

2 badges (misc.)

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Joseph Gibson graduated from Mount Markham High School, later going on to earn his AAS Degree from Herkimer County Community College.

Gibson's military career began in February of 1987, as an active duty member of the Army until 1990. Gibson was recalled for the Gulf War in 1991. In 1999 he joined the Army reserves, where he was deployed on five occasions; two tours in Afghanistan, two tours in Iraq, and his last tour in the Horn of Africa.

In April 2018 he was promoted to Command Sergeant Major and assigned to the 325th Military Intelligence Battalion in Fort Devens, MA. Finally, in Aug 2021, CSM Gibson was assigned to the 8/80th Quartermaster Battalion Fort Lee (now Fort Gregg-Adams), VA where he retired in 2024.

Today CSM Joseph Gibson resides in OH with his wife SFC Brooke Gibson and their 2 children.

Donald G. Pope (1933-2024) - U.S. Air Force

Decorations and Recognitions:

Honorable Discharge

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Donald Pope was always a hard worker, he left home at 13 picking up work at local farms while attending school in Brookfield and later Leonardsville. Pope eventually felt an urge to move on, joining the Air Force.

In the Air Force Pope was assigned to diagnosing issues with parachutes and subsequently fixing them. He was then assigned the role of Load Master, loading cargo planes for the Air Force. While serving, Pope also managed to finish his schooling and earn his GED.

After being honorably discharged, Pope moved back to New York state where he worked several jobs. Donald Pope met his wife, Connie Haynes in 1956, and they began a family, having a son and a daughter. He was an incredibly active father who spent significant time with his children.

Alongside his active parenting, Pope was also an integral part of the West Winfield community, being a member of many local organizations.

Robert “R.J.” Virkler - U.S. Navy

Decorations and Recognitions:

Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal

Combat Action Ribbon

Joint Service Commendation Medal

Joint Service Achievement Medal

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Robert Virkler spent his first eighteen years in West Winfield, where he graduated from Mount Markham in 2007, leaving for Paris Island that summer. During his first enlistment, Virkler participated in two tours of Operation Enduring Freedom.

In his first deployment to Delaram, Afghanistan Virkler managed to survive an IED blast and walk away to finish his first deployment in 2011. Virkler quickly volunteered for a second tour in Kabul, Afghanistan where he would serve until he left active duty for college in 2012.

Eventually Virkler re-enlisted in the Marine Corps reserve, and would go on to hang up his uniform before starting federal service as a DoD civilian with the U.S. Marine Corps.

Francis K. “Frank” Peo - Sgt 1st Class of the U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Francis Peo served from 1949-1952 as a gun commander, anti aircraft crewman, and 1st sergeant. After his deployment, he enlisted in the NY State Police Force where he was assigned to West Winfield. Peo met his wife, Rosemarie Salamone and they have resided in West Winfield ever since.

Peo is an active member of the Lt. Walter J. Will American Legion Post #1058 and has served in the color guard for many years providing service for military funerals, patriotic holidays, parades, and more.

Submitted by the family of Francis Peo

Jason Reynolds - PV1 of the U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Jason Reynolds, raised in Leonardsville, enlisted in the U.S. Army after his graduation from Mount Markham High School in September of 1993 serving in Bosnia and Germany.

After having two kids Reynolds now resides in New Hartford.

Submitted by Rosemarie Peo, aunt

Martin J. Quinn Sr. - Combat Medic for the U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Martin Quinn Sr. served active duty in the Korean war from 1951-1953. After returning from his service, Quinn went on to join the plastics injection molding business.

Quinn was featured on the Tonight Show for his creation known as Spike the Spider. Martin moved his family from Long Island to Cedarville in 1974, founding the Weeping Willows Stables Horse Farm.

Later at the Henry Hiteman Leather Company he founded Save-It-All Products, manufacturing kerosene heater wicks. Quinn Sr. went back to his past of plastic injection molding when he founded Ilion Plastics, which is now owned and operated by his youngest son and grandson.

Martin J. Quinn Sr. unexpectedly passed away in 2000, his family currently resides in West Winfield.

Albert Roscoe Waddell - U.S. Army

Decorations and Recognitions:

Technician Grade 5

Connections to West Winfield and Biography:

Reginald Scanlon - Cpl of the U.S. Air Force

Biography: Reginald Scanlon served as a corporal air control tail gunner in the U.S. Air Force from 1944-1946.

William Glenn Boswell - U.S. Army

Biography: William Boswell served as a helicopter repair gunner, he served one tour of Vietnam from 1967-1970.

C. Kendall Zoller - LT of the U.S. Navy

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: C. Kendall Zoller grew up in West Winfield on the Zoller Farm, he attended West Winfield Central School and was active in sports, music, and drama. After graduation Zoller attended Colgate University and earned a degree in Sociology.

After his college graduation Zoller enlisted within the United States navy, where he earned the rank of lieutenant. Zoller was incredibly proud to have served his country.

Zoller worked as an insurance agent at Northwestern Mutual for over 50 years, as well as a rotarian. He was well known within the West Winfield community for his loving personality as he would always go out of his way to connect with both strangers and friends. Zoller is also known for his humor, one of his favorite things to do was to tell jokes and make others laugh. Zoller enjoyed bird watching, gardening, nature preservation, hunting, and connecting with the world around him.

Russel A. Cowell - U.S. Navy

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Russel Colwell was born in Chadwick, and joined the U.S. navy at the young age of 15 from 1927-1935 where he served on the USS New Mexico.

Cowell married his wife Margaret James Cox in 1938, they moved to West Winfield in 1946 and opened up Colwell's Beauty Salon where they both worked as hair dressers. The business has now been operated by the next two generations of the Colwell family.

Submission by Faith Colwell Burke, granddaughter

Gary L. Greene - Sgt of the U.S. Marine Corps

Decorations and Recognitions:

The Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm

Presidential Unit Citation

Honorable Discharge

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Gary Greene joined the U.S. Marine Corps and served in the Vietnam War from 1967-1968 including in Hue City for the 1968 Tet Offensive.

After his service Greene returned to New York where he served in the police force for 32 years, 21 of them having been within the West Winfield Satellite where he was the Station Commander. Gary Greene still lives in West Winfield with his wife Carol Greene. Gary Greene is incredibly proud of his country and service.

William M. Sink - CTICS of the U.S. Navy

Decorations and Recognitions:

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: William Sink is a native of Utica, he worked with the United States Navy and was integral during the Cold War due to his interpretive skills, with fluency in Russian and Polish, later also becoming proficient in German and Spanish. Sink had found himself on planes, ships, and even submarines due to his language skills.

Sink adopted an incredible appreciation of other cultures throughout his experiences in the Navy. His family had the opportunity to travel with him on several occasions where he managed to provide them with many special cultural opportunities.

Following his retirement Sink continued to commit himself to public service, working in the area as well as becoming a volunteer EMT, firefighter, ambulance driver, and fire policeman. Sink continues to serve his community in many ways, even continuing to use his interpretive skills locally.

Eric D. Rose - Ranger of the U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Eric Rose graduated from Mount Markham High School as a member of the graduating class of 2000. Rose served in the U.S. Army from 2004-2007 attending Army Airborne school at Fort Benning, becoming a part of the 1st Battalion 75th Ranger Regiment stationed at Hunter Army Airfield. Rose served two tours in Iraq and two tours in Afghanistan.

Matthew Willems - Medical Corps of the U.S. Army

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Matthew Willems was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942, tasked with driving supplies to the front lines of the Pacific theater.

After returning home from his service Willems worked for the Town of Winfield highway department, later he worked as a feed truck driver for GLF and Agway. Willems was an active member of the Henry Hiteman Fire Department and emergency squad. He represented West Winfield at Herkimer County fire meetings and was a judge for parades. Willems favorite past time was bowling, he was a member of several teams throughout the years.

William Willems - U.S. Army

Biography: Willems enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1940, becoming a member of the 5th Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Infantry Division. William Willems lost his life in the North Africa campaign in Carthage Tunisia on June 28, 1943, he is buried in North Africa.

Karl Burket - Sgt of the U.S. Marine Corps

Decorations and Recognitions:

Naval Achievement Medal
Sea Service Deployment Medal,
Combat Action Medal
Saudi Arabian Medal
Liberation of Kuwait Medal

Connections to West Winfield and Biography: Karl Burket graduated from Mount Markham High School in 1985, immediately joining the Marine Corps and attending boot camp at Parris Island. Burket then attended tank crew member school at Ft. Knox where he graduated with honors.

Burket was a member of the reserve unit, Bravo Company 8th Tank Battalion. While in Bravo Co. he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and appointed tank commander. In November of 1990 Sargent Burkert's unit was activated and deployed to Operation Desert Storm.

Burket is now a proud member of VFW post 358 and American Legion Post 234.