

42nd Combat Aviation Brigade

[National Guard wraps up busy hurricane season:](#)

Army.mil, December 1, 2017

[Rochester soldier re-enlists with New York Army National Guard:](#)

Notable Names, Dec. 6, 2017

53rd Troop Command

[National Guard member reunites with puppy she rescued after hurricane \(video\):](#)

Bradenton Herald, Dec. 6, 2017

[Soldier reunites with puppy she helped rescue in St. Croix during Hurricane Maria : Puppy found in poor conditions after storm:](#)

ABC Action News, Dec 6, 2017

[Woman drives 1,300 miles to Bay area, reunites with dog rescued during Hurricane Maria \(video\) :She rescued the puppy in the hurricane-ravaged island of St. Croix :](#)

WFLA, Dec. 6 , 2017

[Virgin Islands dog finds new home with New York National Guard MP:](#)

Army.mil,December 4, 2017

[Virgin Islands dog finds new home with New York MP:](#)

National Guard, December 04, 2017

New York Air National Guard

[Ballston Spa resident first woman to serve as top enlisted Guard leader:](#)

Times Union, December 3, 2017

[Photos: Honoring a president on his 235th birthday:](#)

Times Union, Dec. 6, 2017

[51 Percent \(Radio Show\) #1480: Armenian Women Take Up An Ancient Art, Storyteller Experiences Lockdown Drill:](#)

WAMC , Dec. 6, 2017

[N.Y. Air Guard honors President Martin Van Buren on birthday:](#)

National Guard.mil , December 06, 2017

New York Army National Guard

[Two brothers end NY National Guard service together in joint retirement:](#)

Army.mil , December 5, 2017

[Two brothers end New York National Guard service together:](#)

National Guard, By Eric Durr | New York National Guard | December 06, 2017

[Labbate, Pizio receive Army National Guard promotions:](#)

Eagle News, Dec 06, 2017

[On this date in ...:](#)

Times Union, Dec. 4, 2017

[Happy birthday, Army National Guard :](#)

My Guide OnDecember 2017

[Wayne County soldiers re-enlist with New York Army National Guard:](#)

Wayne Post, Dec. 7, 2017

PFOA Issue

[SCWA Files Complaint Against Manufacturers of Several Groundwater Contaminants:](#)

East End Beacon, December 7, 2017

[Suffolk County Water Authority Files Complaints Over Chemical Contamination Of Public Water Sources :](#)

27east. Com, Dec. 1, 2017

Puerto Rico

[Cuomo: Feds Should Be Ashamed of Puerto Rico Recovery :: "Their priorities are upside down," Cuomo said of Congress:](#)

4 New York, Dec. 2, 2017

[Cuomo says NY sending 1,000 water filters to Puerto Rico:](#)

WBNG Dec 04, 2017,

Veterans

[Pastor does double duty for Methodists, Lutherans:](#)

Adirondack Daily Enterprise, Dec. 2, 2017

42nd Combat Aviation Brigade

National Guard wraps up busy hurricane season

Army.mil, December 1, 2017 :

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Three back-to-back hurricanes that brought large-scale destruction to the Gulf Coast region, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands kept the National Guard busy during the 2017 hurricane season.

Approximately 2,800 Guard members still play an active role in recovery efforts in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, more than two months after Hurricane Maria -- the last of the back-to-back storms.

"A lot of people need our help and I joined to serve," said Pfc. Roberto Rivera, a military police officer with the Puerto Rico Army National Guard's 480th Military Police Company. Like many residents of Puerto Rico, his house was destroyed by wind and torrential rain brought in from Maria. But as soon as the hurricane passed, he came to the aid of his fellow Puerto Ricans affected by the storm, said Rivera.

"I just believe [other] people need more help than I do," he said.

Hurricane Harvey, the first of the three hurricanes, made landfall in Corpus Christi, Texas, Aug. 25. More than 3,000 Guard members were on duty in the immediate aftermath of the storm, primarily assisting local authorities with search and rescue operations.

"This is what we train for," said Army Brig. Gen. Patrick M. Hamilton, commander of the Texas National Guard's Domestic Operations Task Force. "And we're proud to stand beside our civilian partners, first responders and volunteers to serve the citizens of Texas."

When Harvey made its second landfall in Louisiana, the Texas Guard supplemented the Louisiana National Guard in response efforts.

"They were here during Katrina, and they helped us last year during the [Baton Rouge area] floods," said Army Maj. Gen. Glenn H. Curtis, the adjutant general of the Louisiana National Guard. "That bond, that feeling you get when you cross state borders to help those in need, to provide relief, that's what makes the National Guard special."

While Guard members kept busy in Texas and western Louisiana, Hurricane Irma slammed through the Caribbean, making its way to Florida, where 4,000 Guard members stood ready to respond.

In the Florida Keys, Soldiers with Florida Army National Guard engineer units used heavy equipment to clear a major highway within 24 hours of the storm passing, allowing first responders and civil agencies access to the area.

"We now have the unique opportunity to help these fellow Floridians take their first steps toward rebuilding and recovery," said Army Lt. Col. Betsy Evans, commander of the Florida Army Guard's 753rd Brigade Engineer Battalion.

In the Caribbean, where the storm knocked out cell towers and power lines, Air National Guard units provided communications abilities with the Joint Integrated Site Communications Capability system.

"When we first arrived in St. Thomas, [Virgin Islands], all cell services, local phone lines and Internet services were down," said Air Force 2nd Lt. Tyler Olsen, the JISCC officer in charge with the Utah Air National Guard's 151st Air Refueling Wing. "We were able to establish voice and data for the first time on the island since Hurricane Irma had wiped them out."

Relying on satellite communications, the JISCC system allows for communications across multiple radio, data, video and voice platforms during emergencies or large-scale disasters. Roughly two weeks after Irma tore through Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in early September, Maria followed suit, causing widespread blackouts and many areas to be without drinkable water.

"Our unit has been supplying approximately 9,000 gallons of potable water a day to civilians," said Air Force Master Sgt. Isaac Strickler, a power production supervisor with the

Ohio Air National Guard's 179th Airlift Wing, whose unit operated water purification systems in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Maria.

He added that many local residents were grateful for the Airmen's presence.

"Everyone has been gracious and have even brought us some homemade meals, a welcomed change from MREs (meals ready-to-eat)," said Strickler.

The Puerto Rico Army National Guard's 892nd Multi-Role Bridge Company set up a temporary bridge for people in Guajataca, Puerto Rico, allowing for transportation of municipal workers and residents.

"That's why we're proud to serve here because we are a part of creating access to the local area," said Sgt. 1st Class Santos Febus, a platoon sergeant with the 892nd MRBC.

Army Guard aviation Soldiers flew doctors, nurses and civil authorities to isolated communities unreachable by ground transportation. They also brought in needed supplies to residents.

"We delivered baby formula, diapers and other baby sundries, premature-baby medicines, insulin, feminine hygiene products, over-the-counter medication and tarps," said Army Lt. Col. Jason Lefton, commander of the New York Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 142nd Aviation Regiment.

Getting supplies and personnel to affected areas meant establishing a staging point for airborne transportation. In Savannah, Georgia, various Air Guard units operated a distribution hub, providing the means to execute large-scale airlift operations.

"It was really an entire wing effort to support the ongoing recovery efforts," said Air Force Col. Shaun Perkowski, commander of the West Virginia Air National Guard's 167th Airlift Wing, which provided C-130 Hercules and C-17 Globemaster III aircraft and their crews to move supplies and personnel. "The value of airlift cannot be underestimated."

All told, roughly 6,200 Guard members from 38 states supported relief and recovery operations in response to Maria. Additionally, more than 18,300 Guard members from 34 states and close to 21,000 Guard members from 29 states and territories supported Harvey and Irma operations, respectively.

For many Guard members, responding to the hurricanes was just part of the job.

"I got a call asking if I could deploy within 36 hours," said Air Force Maj. Mark Smith, a chaplain with the Tennessee Air National Guard's 118th Wing. "I went home, told my family goodbye, threw my gear in a bag and hit the road again. That's what we do."

https://www.army.mil/article/197592/national_guard_wraps_up_busy_hurricane_season

[Return to top](#)

Rochester soldier re-enlists with New York Army National Guard

Notable Names, Dec. 6, 2017 :

Spc. Jeffrey Pieper, of Rochester, recently re-enlisted to continue service in the New York Army National Guard.

Pieper serves with the Company B, 3-126th Aviation.

"New Yorkers count on our citizen soldiers to be ready and be there when disaster strikes, and our nation counts on our soldiers when duty calls for overseas service," Maj. Gen. Anthony German said. "I congratulate our members for choosing to stay in service and striking that balance between military duties, education or employment commitments and family obligations."

<http://www.mpnnow.com/news/20171206/notable-names>

[Return to top](#)

53rd Troop Command

National Guard member reunites with puppy she rescued after hurricane (video)

Bradenton Herald, Dec. 6, 2017 :

Note: Spc. Bridget Burch is assigned to the 206th MP Company, she volunteered to deploy with the 105th.

Lakewood Ranch - When National Guard specialist Bridget Burch returned home to New York from her deployment on St. Croix, she couldn't stop talking about a puppy. The two had met when Burch's unit was on the island to assist the Virgin Island Police Department after Hurricane Maria. But almost as soon as she fell in love with the retriever-mix puppy she came to call Lily, the dog was gone. The ASPCA picked up the litter to take them off the island.

Burch was heartbroken.

"She missed her terribly," said Burch's mother, Keri. "It's all she's talked about."

But it wasn't long after she returned to her upstate New York town of Hartford, that Burch found out where Lily had been taken - Nate's Honor Animal Rescue in Bradenton.

And on Wednesday, nearly six weeks and a 20-hour road trip later, Burch reunited with the puppy she fell in love with thousands of miles away.

At the end of October the shelter received 24 homeless dogs and cats from St. Croix displaced by the hurricane, Associate Director Karen Slomba said.

Sixteen of the animals have been adopted, she said, including all of Lily's siblings. Two of the puppies went home with two of Burch's colleagues who had accompanied her on the deployment.

While the shelter had reunited rescuers and rescued animals before, Slomba said they've never had an international situation like this one.

"It's amazing," Slomba said. "It doesn't take long to fall in love with an animal and it really does show that people, like this woman, will go to great lengths to give an abandoned puppy a home."

For Burch, it was simple, there was just something about the dog.

Her unit had found the litter of puppies near an abandoned warehouse next to the station where they were staying, Burch said.

The puppies were in bad shape, and covered in mud.

"They were hit harder, it felt, than anyone else. The pets are kind of the forgotten ones on the island," said Burch, 20. "Because the dogs couldn't leave and people leave them, and they don't know why they were abandoned.

They're just trapped."

During the week the soldiers looked after the puppies before the ASPCA picked them up, Burch and Lily quickly formed a strong bond.

"She was just special. I don't know, there was just something there," Burch said. "She stuck out to me and would always keep coming back."

It was after Burch returned home from her deployment when she discovered that Lily's litter was at Nate's. She already had her mind made up, Lily needed to be hers.

She immediately contacted Slomba to arrange the adoption.

And while the details were being set, Lily was placed in a foster home with Andrew Rowe, a Lakewood Ranch resident who had adopted Lily's sister, Lucia.

When Rowe brought Lily to the shelter on Wednesday to give her back, he was broken up.

In just the two weeks he cared for the now 3-month-old puppy, he had fallen in love with her, too, he said.

"I just lost one, so this is hard," Rowe emotionally choked out as he held Lily in his arms. "But I just want her to go to a good home."

When Burch showed up, Rowe shook her hand and thanked her for her service.

And then she saw Lily.

With tears in her eyes, Burch walked up to the pup.

Lily looked up, and immediately bounded to Burch, who scooped her up and wrapped her in a tight hug.

<http://www.bradenton.com/news/local/article188396684.html>

[Return to top](#)

Soldier reunites with puppy she helped rescue in St. Croix during Hurricane Maria : Puppy found in poor conditions after storm

ABC Action News, Dec 6, 2017:

Note: Spc. Bridget Burch is assigned to the 206th MP Company, she volunteered to deploy with the 105th.

Bridget Burch never thought she would meet a close friend while working as a relief worker with the National Guard in St. Croix. The area had just been hit by Hurricane Maria and she was there to help.

"Those were some of the toughest conditions I've seen. I give those people credit for what they went through," said Burch.

She noticed one day there were several abandoned puppies near her station.

She started caring for one she named Lilly.

"We were attached. I don't know how to explain it," said Burch.

About ten days after the two became friends, an animal rescue group came for Lilly.

"I knew she would be in good hands," said Burch.

Burch returned to the U.S. last month and decided she wanted to see her friend again.

"I called up the animal rescue group and told them I wanted to adopt her," said Burch.

Lilly was being cared for at Nate's Honor Rescue in Bradenton. Group workers said they were helping Lilly recover. She was ready to be adopted this week, so Burch got on a plane.

"I can't explain how happy I am to see her again," said Burch.

<https://www.abcactionnews.com/news/region-sarasota-manatee/bradenton/soldier-reunites-with-puppy-she-helped-rescue-in-st-croix-during-hurricane-maria>

[Return to top](#)

Woman drives 1,300 miles to Bay area, reunites with dog rescued during Hurricane Maria (video) :She rescued the puppy in the hurricane-ravaged island of St. Croix

WFLA, Dec. 6 , 2017:

Note: Spc. Bridget Burch is assigned to the 206th MP Company, she volunteered to deploy with the 105th.

MANATEE COUNTY, Fla. (WFLA)-A woman from upstate New York drove all the way down to Tampa Bay to reunite with a puppy she befriended during Hurricane Maria.

Bridget Burch of Buffalo, New York is a member of the National Guard. She was among the first responders to help with recovery efforts in St. Croix after Maria left the Caribbean island in ruins this fall.

"For me, that was some of the worst conditions I've ever seen people living in," Burch recalled.

And it wasn't just humans living in terrible conditions. Burch said shortly after they arrived, her unit came across a litter of puppies inside a dilapidated building.

"They were all covered in mud and not looking very well and we took care of them," she said. "There's just so many animals that lost their homes. If a person lost their home all their animals lost their home too and the person can only do so much for themselves and their kids, the pets are kind of the forgotten ones on the island."

Burch immediately bonded with a puppy she named "Lilly." She cared for Lilly every day, feeding her scraps from her rations.

"There was like a connection, as soon as I picked her up she would follow me around, I would go and find her, she would find me," Burch said.

Lilly was eventually handed over to a rescue organization. Months later, she made her way to Nate's Honor Rescue in Manatee County.

In the meantime, Burch kept track of the dog, vowing one day to provide Lilly a new home. Once Burch got back to New York, she made immediate plans to drive 1,300 miles to the rescue in Manatee County-and on Wednesday morning, after months apart, the pair reunited.

When Burch walked through the door, Lilly instantly recognized her and ran over. Burch hugged and kissed Lilly while holding back tears.

"I was pretty worried with how she was going to make it, how well she was doing, she was pretty sick when I found her. But I can't explain, [I feel] just happiness.reunited with her again," said Burch.

"It's such a bad thing when everything you have is just taken, your people leave you and you don't know why they're leaving you and [the pets] probably got hit harder than anybody else on the island," she said.

But these two were meant to be and neither distance nor a hurricane can keep these friends apart.

Some of Lilly's siblings were adopted by other members of the New York National Guard, so she has some play dates to look forward to when she goes to her new home.

Nate's Honor Rescue still has two dogs and five cats rescued from St. Croix who are looking for homes. Both dogs are extremely shy after what they went through, and officials say they will require experienced dog owners.

If you're interested, contact Nate's Honor Rescue at 941-747-4900.

<http://wfla.com/2017/12/06/woman-drives-1300-to-bay-area-reunites-with-dog-rescued-during-hurricane-maria/>

[Return to top](#)

Virgin Islands dog finds new home with New York National Guard MP

Army.mil,December 4, 2017:

ST.CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands - ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands - Lots of Soldiers bring back a deployment souvenir, but New York Army National Guard Spc. Stefanie DeManincor's souvenir from the U.S. Virgin Islands has four legs, a happily wagging tail, and answers to the name of Ava.

DeManincor, who lives in Scottsville, New York, just south of Rochester, was one of 98 members of the 105th Military Police Company who deployed to the island of St. Croix in September. The MPs were there as part of the New York National Guard's response to the Virgin Islands recovery from Hurricanes

Irma and Maria.

Operating from a Virgin Islands Police Department station in Frederickstead, the New York MPs conducted patrols, curfew enforcement, and crowd control and set up traffic control points to assist the island's police department.

"We did whatever they needed us to do," said DeManincor, a traditional National Guard Soldier who works at Paychex in Rochester.

Next door to the police station there was roofless abandoned building where a dozen dogs were "hanging out." The Soldiers tried to make friends with the dogs.

One of those dogs was Ava, a six-month old, brown and white, female pit bull mix, that DeManincor first saw wagging her tail at her from a balcony on that building.

"You could just tell how friendly she was," DeManincor said. "She would come up to us and let us pet her. She was the most friendly one."

The dog was covered in fleas and ticks, but DeManincor was won over. Ava was less fearful than the other dogs, DeManincor said, but that made it more likely that she would wander off and get hurt.

DeManincor wanted to adopt the dog and take her home.

But that meant finding the right people.

Fortunately, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals had sent a response team to St. Croix in the wake of the storms to deal with abandoned and stray animals.

DeManincor found Joel Lopez, the ASPCA's director of planning and field operations, who was heading the team on St. Croix. Lopez found Ava on the side of the road eating a bag of potato chips and looking sad. He took Ava to an emergency shelter the ASPCA had established at the request of the Virgin Islands department of Agriculture.

Lopez located the owner of Ava and the other dogs, who surrendered rights to them.

DeManincor visited Ava in the animal shelter, got the dog the required shots, and signed adoption papers for the dog from the shelter.

The next step was to get Ava back to New York from St. Croix.

This problem was solved by retired Navy Cmdr. Sali Gear, a former Navy pilot, a native of St. Croix and a Virginia Beach, Virginia, resident who runs a non-profit organization called Island Dog Rescue.

Island Dog Rescue is basically herself and one other person, Gear said. They work to convince islanders to spay and neuter their dogs, and they also work to find homes on the mainland for unwanted Virgin Islands dogs.

Gear had already chartered a Pilatus plane to fly 20 dogs from St. Croix to Florida. These were "community dogs" for dogs who had an owner but had been separated and needed care. Ava fell into this category.

She was especially happy to help DeManincor bring Ava to her home.

As a veteran herself, and a native of the Virgin Islands, she was really appreciative of the mission that DeManincor and the other 105th MP Company Soldiers were on, Gear said.

So the first stop on Ava's trip to New York was a plane ride from St. Croix to Florida. The next leg of the trip involved putting Ava and three other dogs in a van traveling from Florida to Charleston, South Carolina, where a friend who is a horse trainer kept Ava on her farm.

Gear then flew her own plane from Virginia to South Carolina and brought Ava back to her house in Virginia Beach. She spent time with her dogs, Gear said, and got used to people and other dogs.

"Ava was so loved by everyone," Gear said.

Ava spent two weeks with Gear before DeManincor got back from the deployment to St. Croix. She was ready to drive from Rochester to Virginia Beach to pick up Ava, but Gear had a better solution.

A Navy captain (O-6) offered to fly Ava to State College, Pennsylvania, in his private plane. That cut DeManincor's driving time from 10 hours to 4.

So after three flights, and a few weeks, Ava was with her new owner on Nov. 3.

What Gear and Island Dog Rescue did was tremendous, DeManincor said. She couldn't have afforded to have the dog shipped home on her own, and Gear took the time to send her photographs of Ava while she was still on duty in St. Croix.

Now she and Ava are back home in Scottsville together. Her house is "getting out in the country" so there's plenty of room for Ava to run, DeManincor said.

"Her temperament is amazing for a puppy. She is adjusting well. She loves to play. She has a favorite toy, a stuffed giraffe," DeManincor said.

"I was lucky. It all ended up working out in my favor," DeManincor said.

DeManincor also said she felt lucky to be able to go on the mission to St. Croix.

"The mission was what I feel was a once in a lifetime experience," she said.

"It was a great mission."

"Just being in the unit I have done a lot of cool things. This is probably ranking as the coolest thing I've done," DeManincor said.

"You have to embrace the suck sometimes. But I have gotten a lot of great things out of being in the Army so far," she added.

https://www.army.mil/article/197665/virgin_islands_dog_finds_new_home_with_new_york_national_guard_mp

[Return to top](#)

Virgin Islands dog finds new home with New York MP

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<http://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/1387069/virgin-islands-dog-finds-new-home-with-new-york-mp/>

[Return to top](#)

New York Air National Guard

Ballston Spa resident first woman to serve as top enlisted Guard leader

Times Union, December 3, 2017:

Command Chief Master Sgt. Amy Giaquinto of Ballston Spa has become the first woman and first Air National Guard member to serve as top enlisted leader of the 16,000-member New York Army and Air National Guard.

Giaquinto is now the senior enlisted advisor to Maj. Gen. Anthony German, the adjutant general and commander of the New York Army and Air National Guard and other state militia forces.

Since the position was created in the 1970s it has been held by male New York Army National Guard command sergeants major.

Giaquinto was named the command chief master sergeant for the 5,800-member New York Air National Guard in 2016. Prior to that she served as the top enlisted leader for the 109th Airlift Wing at the Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia.

She is now "dual-hatted" as the overall enlisted leader for the New York Army National Guard and the enlisted leader for the New York Air National Guard.

Giaquinto replaced Command Sgt. Maj. David Piwowarski, also of Ballston Spa.

Piwowarski was named as New York National Guard and New York Army National Guard command sergeant major in 2016. He will continue to serve as the senior enlisted soldier in the 10,300-member New York Army National Guard.

The change was made to make sure that Giaquinto would have the opportunity to seek promotion to a national-level enlisted leadership position, according to German. Giaquinto has the skills to go out into the field and learn what soldiers and airmen are concerned about, while also communicating on his behalf, German said.

Giaquinto kicked off her military career by serving as an Army enlisted soldier from 1984 to 1987 at United States Army Europe Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany.

After leaving the Army in 1987, Giaquinto had a 10-year break in service.

In 1997 she joined the 109th Airlift Wing, which specializes in flying C-130s in the Antarctic and Arctic. She served in information management, administration and human resources jobs at the 109th between 1997 and 2011. She also deployed to Afghanistan in 2009.

From 2011 to 2013 she served as personnel superintendent at the New York Air National Guard Headquarters in Latham.

In 2013 she was named command chief for the 109th Airlift Wing, a position she held until 2016.

She's also now part of a dual military family; her husband Chief Master Sgt. Mark Giaquinto is a member of the 109th Airlift Wing. They have one daughter in college, a son just starting high school, and a married daughter who belongs to the Kentucky Air National Guard.

Final flight

New York Army National Guard Maj. Michael Audette of Rexford, an Army aviator capped his 23-year career on Nov. 1 with a traditional military "final flight" in which he was greeted on return with a salute from airport fire trucks and a line of well-wishers congratulating him. Audette earned his commission as a second lieutenant in the Army from the Embry Riddle Aeronautical University Army ROTC program in May 2000.

Following the Armor Officer Basic Course and Scout Leader Course at Fort Knox, Ky., Audette served with the 1st Cavalry Regiment in Fort Wainwright, Alaska. In 2002, he was reassigned to Fort Huachuca, Ariz., where he served as a flight platoon leader.

In 2004 Audette joined the New York Army National Guard. He currently serves full time as the assistant operations officer for the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade.

He has served as the intelligence officer in the 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter, the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade, logistics officer and the 42d Combat Aviation Brigade and Division secretary of the general staff.

In 2008, Audette deployed to Iraq for a combat tour with the Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 142nd Assault Helicopter as assistant operations officer, and in 2013 Audette deployed again to Kuwait as the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade logistics officer.

Audette earned a bachelor of science degree in professional aeronautics from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. He also earned a master of business administration degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy.

He has earned a Meritorious Service Medal, an Air Medal, an Army Commendation Medal, an Army Achievement Medal, an Army Reserve Components Achievement Medal, Senior Aviator Wings, an Army Parachutist Badge, an Air Assault Badge and a U.S. Cavalry Spur Holder.

Audette has a wife, Jennifer, and has two sons, Gabriel and Samuel.

<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Ballston-Spa-resident-first-woman-to-serve-as-top-12402655.php>

[Return to top](#)

Photos: Honoring a president on his 235th birthday

Times Union, Dec. 6, 2017 :

KINDERHOOK -- The New York National Guard marked the 235th birthday of President Martin Van Buren at his gravesite in the Kinderhook Cemetery on Tuesday in Kinderhook with a wreath-laying ceremony.

The Columbia County native, known as Old Kinderhook, died on July 24, 1862.

His home, Lindenwald, is a national historic site.

<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Photos-Honoring-a-president-on-his-235th-birthday-12409193.php>

[Return to top](#)

51 Percent (Radio Show) #1480: Armenian Women Take Up An Ancient Art, Storyteller Experiences Lockdown Drill

WAMC , Dec. 6, 2017 :

On this week's 51%, a Massachusetts artist returns to Armenia to empower women in an ancient art and we tune in to an essay about a lockdown drill.

I'm Allison Dunne and this is 51%.

Massachusetts artist Suzi Banks Baum returned to Armenia in November to continue leading her "New Illuminations," a workshop that introduces Armenian women to the art of book making, an integral part of their culture, but where they have been absent from the tradition. Baum's workshop empowers

women to learn the skill of this ancient art to tell stories of their lives through the books they make, illuminating women's experiences through contemporary manuscripts. I caught up with Baum before she departed for her third trip to Armenia, second for the workshop and she starts by talking

about what happened last time around.

That was Suzi Banks Baum, artist, writer and community organizer, who returned to Armenia in November to lead her "New Illuminations" workshop.

She resides in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts. I spoke with her around this time in 2016 as she was about to embark on leading her first workshop there. That interview is in 51% Show #1425, online at wamc.org.

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) - A 23-year-old veteran of the U.S. military now serving as the top enlisted leader of the New York Army and Air National Guard is the first woman to hold the position. State officials say Air National Command Chief Master Sgt. Amy Giaquinto became the first Air Guard

noncommissioned officer to hold the job of senior enlisted adviser to the top ranked general in the New York National Guard. The position had been held by male New York Army National Guard command sergeant majors since it was created in the 1970s. Giaquinto's military career began in 1984, with

three stints in the U.S. Army. After a 10-year break in service, the Ballston Spa resident joined the Air Guard's 109th Airlift Wing in Schenectady County.

We close the show with an essay from writer Dr. Jeri Burns.

Dr. Jeri Burns is a storyteller, writer, and educator living in New York's Hudson Valley. You can find her at www.storycrafters.com. She also is an adjunct professor in the Department of Communication at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

And that's our show for this week. Thanks to Patrick Garrett for production assistance. Our executive producer is Dr. Alan Chartock. Our theme music is Glow in the Dark by Kevin Bartlett. This show is a national production of Northeast Public Radio. If you'd like to hear this show again, sign up for

our podcast, or visit the 51% archives on our web site at wamc.org. And follow us on Twitter @51PercentRadio

<http://wamc.org/post/1480-armenian-women-take-ancient-art-storyteller-experiences-lockdown-drill>

[Return to top](#)

N.Y. Air Guard honors President Martin Van Buren on birthday

National Guard.mil , December 06, 2017:

KINDERHOOK, N.Y. - Twenty-two members of the New York Air National Guard marked the 235th birthday of Martin Van Buren, the eighth president of the United States and the man who helped popularize the term "OK," during a graveside service in Kinderhook on Tuesday. Brig. Gen. Timothy LaBarge, the chief of staff for the New York Air National Guard, and Command Chief Master Sgt. Dennny Richardson, from the 109th Airlift Wing, joined local residents in honoring Van Buren by placing a wreath at his grave on behalf of President Donald J. Trump as a light rain began to fall.

A wreath from the sitting president is traditionally placed at the gravesites of former presidents on the anniversary of their birth. Placing the wreath at Van Buren's grave in the

Dutch Reformed Cemetery in Kinderhook is the responsibility of the New York National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters.

While Martin Van Buren was not one of the nation's Founding Fathers-he was born in 1782, six years after the Declaration of Independence-he was a visionary who helped put the United States on a "path to greatness," LaBarge said in his remarks.

Van Buren believed in the words of the Declaration of Independence, which states that "all men are created equal" and was one of the first members of the Free Soil Anti-Slavery Party, LaBarge told the audience of about 50 people.

The 109th Airlift Wing provided a chaplain, Airmen for an honor cordon, buglers and a color guard for the short ceremony.

The National Park Service, which administers the Martin Van Buren Historic Site, which includes Lindenwald, the farm Van Buren called home, also took part in the event and presented a wreath.

Wreaths were also presented from the town of Kinderhook, Columbia County, New York, the Kinderhook Garden Club and the Friends of Lindenwald, a group which supports the historic site.

Fourth graders from Ichabod Crane Elementary School in Valatie, New York, took part in the ceremony and presented a narrative of Van Buren's life.

Van Buren, who served in the White House from 1837 to 1841, was born in Kinderhook on Dec. 5, 1782. He was the first president who was not born a British subject, and grew up speaking Dutch at home.

Van Buren, who was nicknamed the Red Fox of Kinderhook because of his red hair and political acumen, served as New York's governor, then as secretary of state, as vice president, and played a key role in the creation of the Democratic Party.

He was also known nicknamed "Old Kinderhook" because of his hometown, and reportedly helped popularized the term "OK" because he scrawled those initials on papers he approved of.

After two unsuccessful runs for president after his only term as president, he retired to his Lindenwald estate outside Kinderhook and died there on July 24, 1862.

<http://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/1389322/ny-air-guard-honors-president-martin-van-buren-on-birthday/>

[Return to top](#)

New York Army National Guard

Two brothers end NY National Guard service together in joint retirement

Army.mil , December 5, 2017 :

LATHAM, N.Y. - Two brothers who deployed to Iraq together in 2005 marked the end of their service in the New York Army National Guard during a joint retirement ceremony at the New York National Guard Headquarters.

Lt. Col. Joseph Claus, age 47, a Cropseyville, New York resident, will end his military service after 30 years on Dec. 15.

His brother, Master Sgt. Leonard Claus, age 50, from Grafton, New York, ended his military service on Nov. 15, after 33 years in uniform.

The two brothers were both awarded the Meritorious Service Medal by Col. David Martinez, the director of intelligence for the New York National Guard.

Both brothers started their careers in the active Army and worked in Military Intelligence units during the Cold War before they joined the Army National Guard. Both men worked in the intelligence operation of the 42nd Infantry Division in Tikrit Iraq; Len Claus as intelligence fusion cell non-commissioned officer in charge and Joe Claus as the intelligence collection management officer.

"We've been through a lot in thirty years," Joe Claus said.

"And it's good to know that no matter what you always have somebody who has got your back," Len Claus added.

The fact that they deployed together to Iraq caused some worry for their families but "being there together we were able to lean on each other a little bit and use that to calm not just ourselves but our families as well," Len Claus added.

"This is pretty amazing that between the two of them they have 63 years of service," Martinez said.

Both brothers have had "magnificent careers," he added. It's not that unusual to have family members serving together in the National Guard, said Joe Claus.

"I think the New York Army National Guard is a family business. There are been a lot of families that have worked with us, so it is not that we are that unusual," he said.

The National Guard itself often feels like one big extended family, Joe Clause added. Soldiers get to know each other well through exercises, training deployments, and state emergency call-ups, he explained.

Len Claus enlisted in the Army as signals intelligence specialist in 1984 and attended the Defense Language Institute where he learned German. After completing his military education he joined the 108th Military Intelligence Battalion in Wildflecken, Germany, where he monitored East German communications.

"Here I was straight off the farm in Grafton, 17 years old, and 12 weeks later I'm doing PT under the Golden Gate Bridge (at the Presidio of San Francisco), Len Claus said. " You couldn't get any better than that. I may have peaked early."

After leaving the Active Army in 1989 Len joined the New York Army National Guard in 1991 and was assigned to the intelligence section of the 42nd Infantry Division in Troy, New York. In 2001, after another break in service due to his civilian job, he joined the 642nd Military Intelligence Battalion, which provided intelligence information to the 42nd Division.

He deployed with the 642nd to Iraq as part of the battalion where he worked as an intelligence analyst in the division's intelligence collection center.

Len Claus remained in the 42nd Infantry Division until 2011 when he was assigned to Company B of the 27th Brigade Special Troops Battalion where he served as the signals intelligence platoon sergeant.

In 2012 he deployed to Afghanistan with the 174th (Forward) Stability Transition Team/Security Force Assistance Team, a New York Army National Guard special unit that worked with the 3rd Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division to train Afghan security forces. After returning from Afghanistan he was assigned to the New York National Guard intelligence directorate where he served as senior intelligence and security non-commissioned officer.

His awards include the Bronze Star, the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Army Overseas Service Ribbon, the NCO Professional Development Ribbon, and the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the National Defense Service Medal and the NATO Medal.

Len Claus currently works as the Rensselaer County Department of Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator.

Lt. Col. Joe Claus joined the Army in 1987 and served in military intelligence like his brother. He left active duty in 1991 and joined the New York Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division in the intelligence section.

In 1994 the division headquarters went through its first Warfighter exercise, Joe recalled. There was a lot of pressure to perform well so the division would not be disbanded, he said, but the division did well.

In 1995 Joe decided to go back on active duty. He served another three years in the Active Army, which included a deployment to Saudi Arabia in 1997/1998 as a military intelligence instructor for the Royal Saudi Land Forces.

After leaving active duty he rejoined the New York Army National Guard and received a direct commission as a second lieutenant.

One of his first missions was the division headquarters response to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, which destroyed the World Trade Center towers in New York City. Joe Claus and other members of the division were on duty to assist in the recovery operation in lower Manhattan.

In 2005, Joe served as the 42nd intelligence collection cell manager in Iraq in 2005.

He did great work in that job, according to Lt. Col. Christopher Ciccone, deputy director of intelligence for the New York National Guard.

"I can tell you story after story of Joe Claus interdicting bad guys on the battlefield, and collecting information that had operators maneuver on them to take them off the battlefield," Ciccone said. "He is a fantastic military intelligence officer."

From 2010 to 2013, Claus commanded the headquarters detachment of the New York Army National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters. He's also served as a logistics planner and mobilization officer.

During his service in the 42nd Division he traveled to Japan and Australia and other missions took him to Germany, Kuwait and Great Britain, Joe recalled. He was also part of the National Guard headquarters cell during the Presidential inauguration in January 2017.

Claus is a graduate of the several military intelligence officer's schools and Army Command and General Staff College.

His awards include the Bronze Star, the Army Commendation Medal, the Joint Service Achievement Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, and the Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Development Medal, and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

In civilian life Joe Claus serves as Emergency Services Chief, responsible for the police and fire departments at the Watervliet Arsenal, the Army's cannon manufacturing plant just north of Albany, N.Y.

"The Army has been great to me. It is pretty much everything I wanted," Joe Claus said. "I walked straight out of high school into the military. It has given me opportunities you can't find anywhere else."

https://www.army.mil/article/197732/two_brothers_end_ny_national_guard_service_together_in_joint_retirement

[Return to top](#)

Two brothers end New York National Guard service together

National Guard, By Eric Durr | New York National Guard | December 06, 2017:

LATHAM, N.Y.--Two brothers who deployed to Iraq together in 2005 marked the end of their service in the New York Army National Guard during a joint retirement ceremony held Dec. 2, at New York National Guard Headquarters here.

Lt. Col. Joseph Claus, 47, of Croseyville, New York, will end his military service after 30 years on Dec. 15.

His brother, Master Sgt. Leonard Claus, 50, of Grafton, New York, ended his military service on Nov. 15, after 33 years in uniform.

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Both brothers started their careers in the active Army and worked in Military Intelligence units during the Cold War before they joined the Army National Guard. Both men worked in the intelligence operation of the 42nd Infantry Division in Tikrit, Iraq; Len Claus as intelligence fusion cell

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<http://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/1390027/two-brothers-end-new-york-national-guard-service-together/>

[Return to top](#)

Labbate, Pizio receive Army National Guard promotions

Eagle News, Dec 06, 2017:

Major General Anthony P. German, the Adjutant General for the State of New York, has announced the promotion of two members of the New York Army National Guard, both from East Syracuse, in recognition of their capability for additional responsibility and leadership.

Michael Labbate, assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 427th Brigade Support Battalion, received a promotion to the rank of specialist.

Justin Pizio, assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-108th Infantry, received a promotion to the rank of sergeant.

Army National Guard promotions are based on overall performance, attitude, leadership ability and development potential.

<https://www.eaglenewsonline.com/news/2017/12/06/labbate-pizio-receive-army-national-guard-promotions>

[Return to top](#)

On this date in ...

Times Union, Dec. 4, 2017 :

1992: Good things come to those who wait, but come on, 12 years? That's how long it took Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Francis T. Ryder of the 42nd Infantry Rainbow Division to be recognized for saving the lives of two people in a spring 1980 car accident outside of Monticello. Ryder, 58, who drove 22 hours to and from his winter home in Florida each month to train with his guard unit in Albany, was awarded the New York State Medal of Valor by the Guard for his actions on April 30, 1980. The ceremony at the New Scotland Avenue Armory marked only the 104th time since World War II that the award was designated.

<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Looking-Back-12405310.php>

[Return to top](#)

Happy birthday, Army National Guard

My Guide OnDecember 2017:

By Maj. Gen. Kent Savre and Command Sgt. Maj. Jon Stanley

On the Wednesday, we celebrate the 381st birthday of the National Guard - the oldest serving military organization in America.

The National Guard was organized in 1636 by the Massachusetts General Court in Salem to protect its families and towns. Militiamen of the bay's settlement mustered for military training, which pioneered a lasting role for the National Guard that continues today. Members of the National Guard have served in combat alongside our joint and combined forces throughout history.

Whether it was New York's notorious "Harlem Hellfighters" who fought in World War I, or Soldiers of California's "Sunshine Division" who assaulted Heartbreak Ridge in the Korean War, the National Guard has played a critical role in the defense of our Nation since its beginning.

In addition to answering the call to conflict, today's citizen-Soldiers and Airmen respond to natural disasters and emergencies, reconstruction missions and counternarcotic operations each year, keeping millions of Americans safe.

After three and a half centuries, the National Guard continues to accomplish the unique dual-mission of serving community and country.

The United States Armed Forces are the greatest team in the world due in large part to Guardsmen and their contributions and selfless service to America.

Happy 381st Birthday, National Guard.

We are proud to serve by your side. Victory starts here, victory through skill.

http://www.myguidon.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=21642&Itemid=44

[Return to top](#)

Wayne County soldiers re-enlist with New York Army National Guard

Wayne Post, Dec. 7, 2017 :

Sgt. Jason Allen, of Williamson, and Staff Sgt. Michael Mack, of Red Creek, recently re-enlisted to continue service in the New York Army National Guard.

Allen serves with the Company B, 3-126th Aviation. Mack will continue service with the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 102nd Military Police Battalion.

"New Yorkers count on our citizen soldiers to be ready and be there when disaster strikes, and our nation counts on our soldiers when duty calls for overseas service," Maj. Gen. Anthony German said. "I congratulate our members for choosing to stay in service and striking that balance between military duties, education or employment commitments and family obligations."

<http://www.waynepost.com/news/20171207/notable-names>

[Return to top](#)

PFOA Issue

SCWA Files Complaint Against Manufacturers of Several Groundwater Contaminants

East End Beacon, December 7, 2017 :

After the U.S. Department of Defense refused to pay for work done by the Suffolk County Water Authority and the Suffolk County Health Department to protect the public from contaminants in private wells surrounding Gabreski Airport, the Water Authority has filed civil complaints against the manufacturers of chemicals contaminating the water supply both in Westhampton Beach and in other locations throughout the county.

The two separate complaints, filed Nov. 30 in the Eastern District Court of New York, are against manufacturers of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) and against manufacturers of the synthetic industrial chemical 1,4-dioxane.

"The ratepayers of the Suffolk County Water Authority should not have to pay for the reckless behavior of companies who knew or should have known about these dangers," said SCWA Chairman James F. Gaughran. "And we're going to do everything we can to make sure they won't."

The PFOA/PFOS complaint charges that the 3M Company; Buckeye Fire Equipment Company; Chemguard Inc.; Tyco Fire Products LP; and National Foam, Inc. knew or should have known that the firefighting foam they made, distributed or sold is dangerous to human health and contains unique characteristics that cause extensive and persistent environmental contamination, according to the complaint.

The 1,4-dioxane complaint includes the same claims against Dow Chemical Company, Ferro Corporation, Vulcan Materials Corporation, Proctor & Gamble and Shell Oil Company in regard to their products—primarily industrial degreasers, laundry detergents and other household products.

All three chemicals have the potential to cause cancer. PFOA and PFOS are particularly dangerous to pregnant women and children, while 1,4-dioxane causes liver and kidney damage.

The PFOA/PFOS complaint points out that airports and bases operated by the U.S. Air Force and other branches of the military have used firefighting foams containing the compounds for nearly 50 years to conduct firefighting and explosion drills. These sites have been linked to the widespread contamination of groundwater not just in Suffolk County, but throughout the United States .

The production of PFOA and PFOS was phased out by 2002 under pressure from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, but the mobility and persistence of these contaminants mean that additional treatment will be needed, potentially for decades to come.

In July of 2016, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation gathered groundwater samples surrounding Gabreski Airport and the Air National Guard base in Westhampton Beach, where firefighting foam had been used since the 1970s. PFOA and PFOS were detected in public and private supply wells surrounding the airport.

The Suffolk County Water Authority has already invested more than \$4.8 million for filtration systems, laboratory sampling, and the installation of

water mains to hook up homes that had contaminated private wells surrounding Gabreski Airport, while the Suffolk County Department of Health Services has invested more than \$491,000 for a private well survey groundwater investigation, which included the installation of four groundwater profile wells, laboratory analytical services, and providing bottled water, community outreach and administrative and legal services.

The Water Authority is not the only local agency considering legal actions against the manufacturers of PFOA/PFOS. Southampton Town retained legal counsel in October in consideration of a similar lawsuit over PFOA/POFS contamination at the Hampton Bays Water District's well field near the Hampton Bays Fire Department.

The other chemical, 1, 4-dioxane, is present in a wide variety of industrial and household products, and has been detected in more than 50 percent of supply wells on Long Island.

The synthetic chemical has been primarily used in industrial settings as a stabilizer for chlorinated solvents used to dissolve greasy substances from machines. Its most widespread commercial use is in laundry detergents and other household products such as soaps, deodorants and shampoos.

The Water Authority is currently conducting testing on a treatment system to remove 1,4-dioxane from groundwater using Advanced Oxidation Process, a process they estimate could cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars on Long Island.

<http://www.eastendbeacon.com/scwa-files-complaint-against-manufacturers-of-several-groundwater-contaminants/>

[Return to top](#)

Suffolk County Water Authority Files Complaints Over Chemical Contamination Of Public Water Sources

27east. Com, Dec. 1, 2017 :

The Suffolk County Water Authority has filed two separate lawsuits in the Eastern District Court of New York against the companies responsible for producing products that leached possibly carcinogenic chemicals into public drinking wells.

The SCWA filed the suits on Thursday in an effort to get reimbursement for the costs of ridding the water of the poisonous taint from chemicals perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) and 1,4-Dioxane. Those costs are still unspecified, but the 1,4-Dioxane cleanup alone could cost “hundreds of millions of dollars,” according to a statement from the SCWA.

The dangerous chemicals come from two different sources.

The PFOS and PFOA are believed to originate in foam frequently used in firefighting exercises at the Francis S. Gabreski Airport and Air National Guard Base since the 1970s. The complaint names the 3M Company, Buckeye Fire Equipment Company, Chemguard Inc.,

Tyco Fire Products LP and National Foam, Inc. for knowingly distributing materials that contained these chemicals.

The production of PFOS and PFOA were banned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2002, but traces of the chemicals remain in the water. The New York State Clean Water Infrastructure Act now requires all New York-based water systems to test for the contaminants.

The 1,4-Dioxane comes from industrial greasers, laundry detergent and other household staples like soap. The complaint names Dow Chemical Company, Ferro Corporation, Vulcan Materials Corporation, Proctor & Gamble and Shell Oil Company for similar negligence. According to the SCWA, all three of these chemicals are known to cause cancer.

"The ratepayers of the Suffolk County Water Authority should not have to pay for the reckless behavior of companies who knew or should have known about these dangers," said SCWA Chairman James F. Gaughran in a press release. "And we're going to do everything we can to make sure they won't."

<http://www.27east.com/news/article.cfm/East-End/541512/Suffolk-County-Water-Authority-Files-Complaints-Over-Chemical-Contamination-Of-Public-Water-Sources>

[Return to top](#)

Puerto Rico

Cuomo: Feds Should Be Ashamed of Puerto Rico Recovery :: "Their priorities are upside down," Cuomo said of Congress

4 New York, Dec. 2, 2017 :

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Saturday that the federal government should be ashamed of its response to help Puerto Rico after it was devastated by Hurricane Maria.

Cuomo spoke at John F. Kennedy International Airport before departing to Puerto Rico to check on the recovery there and offer assistance.

"In my opinion, the federal government should be ashamed of itself in the way they've handled this," Cuomo said.

He criticized Congress for staying up all night to pass their tax plan while not acting on the \$94 billion Build Back Puerto Rico bill.

"Their priorities are upside down," Cuomo said. They are committed to passing the help-the-rich-people tax act; they should be as committed to helping-the-desperate-of-Puerto-Rico recovery act."

One-third of Puerto Rico is still without power 72 days after the hurricane and most households still need to boil water, Cuomo said.

Cuomo said New York state has deployed more than 700 people to the island, including doctors, utility crews, state police and the National Guard.

<https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Cuomo-Puerto-Rico-Criticizes-Federal-Government-Tax-Plan--461478473.html>

[Return to top](#)

Cuomo says NY sending 1,000 water filters to Puerto Rico

WBNG Dec 04, 2017, :

NEW YORK (AP) -- New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo says 1,000 water filtration systems will be distributed to hurricane-battered Puerto Rico through a \$1 million privately funded New York initiative.

The Democratic governor made a quick trip to Puerto Rico on Saturday, his third visit since Hurricane Maria struck in September.

While there, Cuomo called on Congress to fund Puerto Rico's \$94.4 billion recovery plan, saying the island faces a long road to recovery.

The water systems New York is sending can filter 12 liters per hour, enough water for 75 to 100 people per day.

Cuomo said New York also has delivered supplies including 2.1 million bottles of water and 1.6 million diapers to Puerto Rico.

The state has sent hundreds of utility employees and National Guard personnel to help with the recovery.

<http://www.wbng.com/story/36984499/cuomo-says-ny-sending-1000-water-filters-to-puerto-rico>

[Return to top](#)

Veterans

Pastor does double duty for Methodists, Lutherans

**Adirondack Daily Enterprise, Dec. 2, 2017 :
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SARANAC LAKE — Since the summer, the Rev. Eric Olsen has been pastor for two churches: one Methodist, one Lutheran, both housed in the stately gray stone house of worship on the corner of Church and St. Bernard streets.

I thought this was worth an interview, but I didn't get around to it until a month ago when the Enterprise published a heartfelt Guest Commentary titled "Faith, not fear." Olsen wrote it in response to an Enterprise editorial that hoped for increased Christian unity 500 years after Martin Luther triggered the Protestant Reformation.

"The arguments between our denominations within the Christian faith or with those of different world faiths are as inane as fleas arguing over who owns the dog," he wrote. "I refuse to look at other faith groups as competition, nor will I look down upon them and their quest for truth and knowledge."

“Now more than ever we need to respect each other’s voices, listen, learn, pray and fight the real battles and not each other.”

Originally from Staten Island, Olsen moved to Saranac Lake as pastor of the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church shortly after his ordination in 1988. He is probably best known for his military service: He joined the Army as a chaplain in 1992, switched to the Army National Guard in 1999, helped in New York City after 9/11, served in the second Iraq war — where he survived an IED attack and was awarded the Combat Action Badge — and was head chaplain for the entire New York Army National Guard from 2008 until his retirement in 2013.

Since retiring, he returned to being Holy Trinity’s pastor and also to being a prison chaplain at Adirondack Correctional Facility in Ray Brook, which he had done on and off since 1999. He was also hired to lead Homeward Bound Adirondacks, a Saranac Lake-based organization that aimed to help war veterans reintegrate into society, although it hasn’t fulfilled its glowing initial promise.

In July, the Rev. Wilbert Gamble left Saranac Lake’s First United Methodist Church to serve in Watertown. At one point in the recent past, First Methodist’s pastor had covered for the Lutherans until Olsen returned. Now Olsen was asked to lead the Methodist services. It’s only temporarily, but he said the Methodists can’t yet afford to hire a full-time pastor. The two congregations already share more than a building. They come together for Bible study Sunday afternoons and for occasional work days, and some Lutherans serve food at the Methodists’ free community suppers on Wednesday nights. They also share an organist. Now Olsen is trying to get them to share office equipment.

“I’m trying to get past things like, instead of having two copiers, have one copier,” he said. Olsen said about 50 people usually attend each Methodist Sunday service, whereas about 10 to 20 attend the Lutheran services on Sunday evenings.

“Personally, I’m comfortable with both,” he said. The Lutherans are “a little more liturgical, with communion every Sunday and a liturgy [that] is very structured ... whereas the Methodists are very word-oriented. They want solid, good preaching.”

Saranac Lake’s Lutherans tend to have moved here from other places while most local Methodists were born and raised here, Olsen said.

“This was an area that was settled by Methodists many, many years ago,” he said. “The Troy Conference, which started in Troy, New York, settled the whole North Country, whereas the Lutheran church didn’t start until 1980 — you know, for the Olympics.”

Saranac Lake’s Methodist community traces its lineage from the area’s first Christian clergyman, a “circuit-preacher” named Samuel Smith who came here in 1839, according to a December 2002 Enterprise column by Deborah Donaldson.

I asked Olsen what the Methodists need to do to afford their own full-time pastor.

“I’ve learned that Christian churches that are preaching Christ and not getting caught up in other stuff too much will grow,” Olsen said. “There’s a hunger for meaning within our culture. People are saying, ‘Well, churches are dying because kids don’t want to come’ — and kids are dying because they have no meaning.

“Sometimes people get in this survival mode with a church, and this church is not in survival mode. It’s a well-oiled machine that’s looking to grow and looking to thrive. And there are a lot of opportunities to let people know that this is a place for the community, and that’s one

of the things we've been able to do here. There's a community supper every Wednesday where we serve 125 people. Now that's not a 'church' thing, but it is a church thing. The turkey dinner [an Election Day tradition], we served 430 people. That's a lot of people." He said he'd like to see the church host more community events such as trivia nights, family game nights and concerts. He would like to do the same with the Methodist church in Bloomingdale, which merged with the one in Saranac Lake.

"There are very few places right now in Saranac Lake where people can go and have community without paying for it," he said.

He added about the local Methodists, "I have never met a more dedicated — and I'm being very honest here, and I've been around the world — a more dedicated group of people wanting to do right by the people in the community."

The denomination in which Olsen was ordained dates back to Martin Luther, the German monk and theology professor who sparked the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago. These days, the Lutheran and Catholic churches are closer than they have been since then, and Olsen credits that largely to the current Catholic pope, Francis. In our interview, Olsen referred to the church of Rome as "the mother church" that "speaks for Christians globally." He said he became friendly with Catholic Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York through his work with the National Guard.

"The key for me," Olsen said, "that altar is about forgiveness, because the day I don't mess up is they day they bury me, and even then they'll probably blame me for dying on the wrong day."

Olsen is big on ecumenism and thinks Saranac Lake's Ecumenical Council has more good work to do. He would like to bring back the pulpit swap, in which pastors occasionally preach at different churches in the village.

How one practices one's faith in church services is less important than how one practices it out in the world, Olsen said.

"When we take off the chains of doctrine ... we do a lot better."

For those who don't attend church, he asks, "What voices are you listening to to nurture your soul?"

"There are many voices out there, and many of our young people are listening to strange ones."

<http://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/opinion/columns/2017/12/pastor-does-double-duty-for-methodists-lutherans/>
