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Airmen and Soldiers
Look-alike contest: New York Army National Guard Specialist shares joyous return home with family

Livingston County News, June 21, 2020:

The winning photograph in the Livingston County News’ “Like Father, Like Son (or Daughter) Look Alike Contest” shared an exceptional memory and garnered more than 600 votes.

The picture shows Joshua Ver Hague, 38, of Geneseo, with his children Adelyn Ver Hague, 9, Wiley Ver Hague, 7, and Callen Ver Hague, upon Joshua’s return from training with the New York Army National Guard.

The photo, which received 616 votes, is extra special to the family as just a few hours before the picture was taken, Joshua, a specialist in the New York Army National Guard, and his family were told he wouldn’t be able to return home to see his wife Dawn Ver Hague, and their three children. He was told he would have to stay an additional 10 weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Because of the COVID-19 madness, I was told I was not coming home for 10 more weeks," said Joshua, who had just completed 10 weeks of basic training in the National Guard. “Then, 20 minutes later, I was in a van on my way to the airport."

The photo, taken at the Greater Rochester International Airport, is the first time Joshua had seen his family since he left for training.

Joshua considers himself the goofball in his family. While he believes parenting is extremely important, he also believes in having fun.

“We work hard. We do chores together around the yard. We stack firewood, we do honeybees, we garden, and we swim together,” said Joshua. “There is so much in life to teach and so many lessons to give, it’s good to have fun, too.”

Adelyn likes to read while Wiley is quite the jokester, their father said.

“He is witty,” joked Joshua as he spoke about Wiley.

Callen is most like Joshua in the sense he is always “on-the-go,” like his dad.

Joshua recalled a quote he fondly refers to, “A parent’s success is measured by the success of their children.”

In August, Joshua will head to Alabama for training during eight weeks of Officer Candidate School to further his career with the New York Army National Guard.


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Niagara Falls resident receives NAACP service award

WIVB, June 22, 2020:

(WIVB) – A Niagara Falls resident and member of the Air National Guard has been selected as a recipient of the NAACP Roy Wilkins Renown Service Award 2020.

Senior Master Sgt. Venita Smith is assigned to the 107th Attack Wing. She was chosen to receive the award, which emphasizes those who serve their community and are dedicated to improving society, from across the Air Force.

“Senior Master Sgt. Smith exemplifies what a candidate for the Roy Wilkins Award should aspire to be. She is committed to helping anyone she comes in contact with, all Airmen and members of our communities. She is the Airmen’s Airman,” said Col. Gary Charlton, commander of the 107th. “Congratulations, we wish you the best of luck as you compete for the next higher-level award. Senior Master Sgt. Smith makes us all want to stand a little bit taller!”

“Winning this award, it’s not about me. It’s about showing that this is my country…the Air National Guard here in New York can be a model, especially at this wing. I was allowed to shine and be me,” Smith said. “Anything less than ownership is not an option, take care of yourself and others”.


Emergency Response

Multiple services come together under dual-status command

Army.mil, By 1st Lt. Lauren Warner, New York National Guard, June 22, 2020::
Jun 26, 2020

NEW YORK – When Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo decided New York City needed federal troops to help cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, thought the New York National Guard should designate a dual-status commander.

In the aftermath of 2005’s Hurricane Katrina, the dual-status command concept allowed a National Guard officer to command both federal and state troops responding to a domestic emergency.
Since the dual-status commander is a National Guard officer, it gives the governor the ability to control both state and federal troops – for example, Active Army and Army Reserve Soldiers – operating in their state.

Brig. Gen. Michel Natali, New York’s assistant adjutant general, Army, was named New York’s dual-status commander and led the efforts of 1,700 federal and New York National Guard troops supporting New York City and the stress on its health care system.

The Jacob Javits Convention Center became a hospital, medical warehouse and command post; active-duty and reserve military personnel were sent into city hospitals to help overwhelmed medical staff, and Active Army mortuary affairs troops teamed with Guard Soldiers and Airmen to help the medical examiner’s office.

New York was one of eight states to create dual-status commands to deal with pandemic response missions.

It was the second time New York put a dual-status command in place for a crisis. The New York National Guard proved the concept in 2012 when responding to Superstorm Sandy.

Natali located his headquarters at the Division of Military and Naval Affairs headquarters in Latham and designated the staff of the 42nd Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) to serve as his staff.

Active-duty staff officers from Northern Command, called a Joint Enabling Capabilities (JEC) team, plugged into the 42nd CAB staff to link with federal forces, said Army National Guard Col. Benjamin Richardson, the dual-status command chief of staff.

This worked because they ran the dual-status command headquarters just as they would run their brigade, Richardson said.

“In our staff, the quick and full integration of the JEC team was seamless,” Natali said.

The first mission Guard and active-duty troops collaborated on was to turn the Javits convention center into an alternative care hospital at the end of March.

The 104th Military Police Battalion stood up a command post to coordinate the efforts of federal and state agencies and federal troops operating at Javits.

The National Guard, active military medical providers, and civilian agencies assembled a 2,000-bed hospital within a week.

The 133rd Quartermaster Company helped convert the convention center into a hospital and set up a medical warehousing operation in the basement.

The Army’s 44th Medical Brigade from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, provided medical staffing at the Javits New York Medical Station.

“Two medical stations were pulled off in a short period of time and was nothing short of a miracle,” said Command Sgt. Major Robert Jenks, the senior enlisted Soldier at Javits.
The original plan was to accept non-COVID-19 patients, but it became clear that COVID-19 beds were needed. A total of 1,095 patients were treated by May 1, when the last was discharged.

Federal military medical personnel were also sent out to New York City public hospitals, where the civilian staff had been working nonstop.

“The civilian staff at my hospital was burned out and depleted,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Trevor Talbert, a member of the 307th Medical Squadron. “There were at least 40 patients on my floor, and the numbers didn’t start to go down until last week.”

The 531st Hospital Center based out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was able to supervise and control relief to more than 700 active and reserve military medical staff deployed to 12 New York Health and Hospital System facilities across New York City.

In Manhattan, other elements of the dual-status command were addressing another difficult mission related to the pandemic: the collection and processing of thousands who died of COVID-19.

Some 70 members of the 54th Quartermaster Company based at Fort Lee, Virginia, worked with the medical examiner’s office to process the remains of 10,110 people who died from March 26 to May 26.

Meanwhile, more than 300 New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen went into homes and apartments and removed the remains of 2,882 New Yorkers who died there.

https://www.army.mil/article/236658/multiple_services_come_together_under_dual_status_command

New York Air National Guard

Northern Strike remains Guard’s premier joint fires exercise

Army.mil, June 25, 2020 :

LANSING, Mich. – Since 2012, exercise Northern Strike has been held at Michigan National Guard training facilities, morphing into the Department of Defense’s largest annual joint, reserve component readiness event. This year the exercise will look different, but will still take place as the DOD’s premier joint fires integration training opportunity.

Northern Strike 20 will be held July 19-31 at Michigan’s newly renamed National All-Domain Warfighting Center, encompassing Camp Grayling Maneuver Training Center and Alpena
Combat Readiness Training Center. The Michigan National Guard, in partnership with public health officials, has developed a comprehensive plan that allows Northern Strike to continue during the COVID-19 pandemic while safeguarding participants and local communities.

“Northern Strike is designed to challenge training audiences with multiple forms of convergence that advance interoperability across multicomponent, multinational, and interagency partners,” said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Paul Rogers, adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. “The exercise also presents a premier opportunity for Army Futures and Defense Industry partners to test emerging technologies for the future warfight.”

In addition to building overall readiness for DoD audiences, Northern Strike is critical to the economy in Grayling and Alpena, bringing an average of $30 million to Northern Michigan’s economy each year in military pay, travel, and spending.

“Northern Strike fuses Michigan’s unique blend of geography, people, and technology-based industry offer an unmatched opportunity for building readiness for the U.S. military, as well as coalition and industry partners,” said U.S. Air Force Col. John Miner, Alpena CRTC commander. “Of course, this exercise would not be possible without the support of our communities, and we are grateful for the cooperation of numerous local partners who are integral to the planning and execution of Northern Strike each year.”

While Northern Strike typically draws 6,000 to 7,000 National Guard members from 20 states and members of multiple coalition services and every active-duty branch of the U.S. military, units will participate in Northern Strike 20 with fewer personnel on the ground to ensure social distancing. U.S. Air Force squadrons, for instance, will fly A-10, B-52, F-16, and KC-135 aircraft from bases around the U.S. to participate in training scenarios in the airspace of Michigan’s National All-Domain Warfighting Center.

More than 2,300 personnel are expected to participate at Northern Strike 20, including Army and Air National Guard forces from California, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin. Active-duty forces from the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, and personnel from the U.S. Army
Reserves, U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, and NATO partner countries Latvia and Lithuania will also participate.

Michigan National Guard medical officials have worked with public health authorities to incorporate COVID-19 precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Countermeasures include social distancing, required use of masks when social distancing is not possible, and frequent sanitization.

“We have made the decision to accommodate the training needs of Northern Strike participants very carefully, and steps will be taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 to the utmost,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Brian Burrell, Camp Grayling deputy commander. “With this plan in place, we will continue to meet our objective, which is providing Army National Guard and Air National Guard units with a premier venue for joint live-fire proficiency at the company/troop level and multicomponent units from battalion to division level on joint fires integration.”

https://www.army.mil/article/236778/northern_strikeremains_guards_premier_joint_fires_exercise

Duty Calls: Airman promoted after saving life at COVID-19 test site

Times Union, June 22, 2020 ::

A New York Air National Guard airman's successful effort to save a man's life didn't go unnoticed.

Before Sr. Airman Samantha Post finished a recent duty day at the Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia, she experienced two surprises.

First, she was promoted to staff sergeant.

Secondly, Post, an aerospace medical technician with the 107th Medical Group, was promoted by the commander of the New York Air National Guard, Maj. Gen. Timothy LaBarge, during a ceremony at the Scotia base.
She's been on duty providing support as part of the New York National Guard task force's response to COVID-19.

LaBarge had heard Post was on duty at the University at Albany COVID-19 testing site when she quickly responded to a medical emergency and saved a man's life.

Normally, Post is assigned to the 107th Attack Wing's 107th Medical Group at the Niagara Falls Air Force Reserve Station.

LaBarge said he wanted to promote Post himself so he could recognize her for her quick thinking at the test site.

LeBarge pinned Post's new rank insignias on her uniform.

Post has been on duty at Stratton as part of the New York National Guard's effort to help control the spread of COVID-19.

At the UAlbany testing site, because of her medical training, Post was assigned as the unit leader for the military medical team working at the drive-thru testing station established at the Albany campus.

One of her medical staffers told her that a man who was there for a COVID-19 test was ill. Post responded and saw that the man was in need of medical intervention.

"He was extremely short of breath and just wasn't looking in the best shape," she recalled. "I decided to pull him aside out of traffic and tried to see if there was anything I could do to help him. Grabbing a health monitor and all my personal protective equipment, I assessed the situation and acted immediately, listened to his lungs. It was apparent his body was not functioning at a normal rate."

She immediately put the man on oxygen and called for the ambulance standing by at the site to take him to a hospital emergency room.

LaBarge heard about what Post had done, so he and Command Chief Master Sgt. Maureen Dooley, the New York Air National Guard command chief, decided they wanted to promote Post to recognize her service.

"I've been in for 38 years and I can honestly say I don't think I ever saved a life," LaBarge told her after the promotion. "But you can say after four years that you have saved a life. That's a phenomenal thing."

**COVID-19 response**

As of June 16, the New York National Guard still had 2,978 personnel on the COVID-19 response mission across New York state.

This includes 2,466 New York Army National Guard soldiers and 364 New York Air National Guard airmen. A total of 148 members of the New York Guard, the militia defense force, and the New York Naval Militia are also mobilized for the mission in State Active Duty status.
The six Joint Task Forces that have been operating on Long Island, New York City, the Hudson Valley, Capital Region, Syracuse and Buffalo to support state and local governments for the pandemic response will be consolidated into two. One will be based in Syracuse to handle missions in upstate New York while the second will be headquartered in New York City to deal with downstate New York.

The New York National Guard is assisting at five antibody testing sites. A total of 13,649 antibody tests have been administered at the locations, including one at the SEFCU Arena on the University at Albany campus. The National Guard also continues to support 15 drive-thru COVID-19 testing sites.

New York National Guard personnel continue food packaging and distribution. New York soldiers and airmen continue conducting logistics missions, including warehousing and commodity distribution of medical supplies in the Hudson Valley, the Albany area, the Mohawk Valley, and New York City.

Soldiers are operating phones for the New York City Division of Veterans Services. They are assisting in Operation Vet Check, in which veterans are contacted to see how they are doing or if they require assistance. Soldiers are also assisting in staffing phones for a New York City initiative to provide air conditioners to seniors this summer.

New York National Guard soldiers continue to provide administrative support at two New York City 911 call centers.

Soldiers and airmen continue packaging COVID-19 test kits for the New York state Department of Health at the Wadsworth Laboratory in Albany. A total of 1,952,765 COVID-19 test kits have been assembled.

News of your troops and units can be sent to Duty Calls, Terry Brown, Times Union, Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212 or brownt@timesunion.com.


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New York Army National Guard

It's Official: The Army Is Getting Rid of Officer Promotion Photos to Help Eliminate Bias

Military.com, June 25, 2020:

Days after Defense Secretary Mark Esper proposed removing photos from officer promotion board packages as a way to eliminate unconscious bias in the process, the Army has moved to suspend its use of the photos.
In a memo dated Wednesday and signed by Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy and Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, the service announced that use of the photos would be suspended as of Aug. 1.

"The strength of our Army comes from our diversity," the leaders wrote in the memo, reviewed by Military.com. "Developing and maintaining qualified and demographically diverse leadership is critical for mission effectiveness and is essential to national security."

The memo added that the service would begin to evaluate the use of photos on warrant officer and enlisted soldier promotion considerations beginning in August, and would publish an Army directive no later than September 2021 making a policy change permanent regarding use of the photographs.

A defense official confirmed to Military.com that the memo was authentic.

Not all services use promotion photos, which are intended to show military bearing, fitness and attention to proper uniform wear. Neither the Coast Guard nor the Air Force include them as part of the promotion package. Those who oppose use of the photos argue that they favor white men and disadvantage anyone who looks different from the stereotypical image of a military leader.

On June 18, Esper released a video message to the force announcing the establishment of a new "Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion" and proposing, as one initial change, the removal of photos "from promotion, school, and command selection boards -- this is something I pushed as secretary of the Army as we worked to overhaul our personnel system."

Earlier this week, the deputy commander of Army Training and Doctrine Command, Lt. Gen. Ted Martin, published an unofficial Twitter poll asking whether promotion board photos should be eliminated. More than 75% of the 3,255 respondents had voted in the affirmative as of Wednesday.

Army Reserve Maj. Gen. Tammy Smith, military assistant to the assistant secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) for Quality of Life, tweeted, "Nothing in a photo reveals talent."

Jim Perkins, an Army Reserve major in the Army Reserve's 75th Innovation Command who has been vocal about the military's need to change its policy, said photos were "at best a weak proxy" for other qualities such as fitness that can be otherwise quantified in a promotion package.

"What doesn't a picture show? It doesn't show academic achievement -- you can get a badge for two weeks of training with helicopters, but not for a Ph.D. -- or technical certifications and language proficiency. It also shows nothing about a person's recent performance," he said.

"What do a Ranger tab and Combat Infantryman Badge from more than 10 years prior as a lieutenant matter to a board evaluating a major in acquisitions for promotion to lieutenant colonel? They don't, but they reinforce preferences for white men over all others. Military bearing is simply code for conformity to demographic norms."
Inspector Justin Lenz, veteran NYPD commander and National Guard member, dies from heart attack: police

New York Daily News, June 20, 2020:

Inspector Justin Lenz, a 30-year NYPD veteran and National Guard member once hailed for giving his badge number to a fellow soldier, died from an apparent heart attack, officials said.

He was 55.

Lenz died Thursday, according to the NYPD Steuben Association, which represents cops of German or Austrian heritage. He was the Executive Membership Secretary of the organization.

His last assignment in the NYPD was as commanding officer of the department’s Office of Professional Development. Before that, he led cops in the 101st Precinct in Far Rockaway.

“Hearts all over Far Rockaway are broken today with devastating news that former C.O. Justin Lenz has passed away,” the 101st Precinct said on Twitter Friday. “He was a selfless patriot who dedicated his professional life to public service. Our prayers go out to his family as we all mourn the loss of this true leader/friend.”

Lenz joined the department in 1990 and spent his time between the NYPD and the U.S. Army National Guard, where he held the rank of Master Sergeant.

In 2003, he served in the Iraq War with Donovan Bunch as part of the the 442nd Military Police Company. Lenz was one of 23 NYPD police officers in the unit, which is based in Orangeburg, N.Y.

Lenz and Bunch became friends and when Bunch decided to join the NYPD in 2015, the inspector proudly gave him his old shield number 2571, an honor that is usually passed down from parent to child within the department.

“We’ve been friends for a long time — carrying on a shield number, it was just an honor for me to wear it,” Bunch told the Daily News at the time.

Outside of his career, Lenz was a die-hard athlete who would participate in races and athletic competitions, friends said.

Lenz is survived by his wife and two children. A wake, following social distancing rules, will be held at Charles J. O’Shea Funeral Home in Wantagh, N.Y. on Monday followed by a funeral mass at the Parish of St. Barnabas in Bellemore, N.Y.
Multiple services come together under dual-status command

Nationalguard.mil, By 1st Lt. Lauren Warner | New York National Guard | June 22, 2020:

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All Army personnel, veterans asked to be recruiters next week

Army.mil, June 24, 2020 ::

ARLINGTON, Va. -- The Army's top recruiting officer has requested every person affiliated with the Army, including veterans, to be an active recruiter next week, as part of a three-day virtual hiring event that aims to put 10,000 more recruits in boots.

The Army National Hiring Days, which kick off Tuesday, is an all-Army outreach effort to tap into recruiting pools across the country using virtual engagements.

“It's a big deal,” said Maj. Gen. Frank Muth, commander of U.S. Army Recruiting Command. “It's a great opportunity and we're really excited. The Army has never done this before.”

After being ahead by more than 2,200 contracts in mid-March compared to the previous year, the command was forced to temporarily reduce the use of its brick-and-mortar recruiting stations and go entirely virtual due to COVID-19.

“We have to put force protection above mission,” Muth said Tuesday in a discussion for the Association of the U.S. Army’s Noon Report series. “We have to make sure our recruiters and their families know that we care.”

Before the pandemic, the command had actually spent about 20 months trying to digitize efforts in reaching Generation Z youth. Building on previous work, recruiters were still able to conduct 50% to 60% of their normal production until stations reopened in late May, he said.

Now with about 4,000 contracts behind its goal for this time of year, the command has looked for other innovative ways to garner interest in the Army.

Just before the Army birthday on June 14, recruiters held Operation 245, a smaller two-day virtual hiring event that had about 10,000 people commit to speaking with a recruiter. Muth expects that number to eventually result in up to 1,000 contracts.

Active recruiter

The next event, Army National Hiring Days, will be much more widespread with every recruiting battalion slated to conduct media engagements to get the word out, many incorporating Army leaders from operational units.
“We’re just asking everybody [to] help push,” said Muth, who will speak to media in the Baltimore area, where he is originally from. “And what we’re trying to do is two things: drive [potential recruits] to GoArmy.com, or drive them into the stations.”

He also appealed to the entire Army family to help pitch in by sharing social media posts that highlight the event, or to create their own video or message to publish on their accounts asking people to join the service.

The Army offers over 150 different careers, he said, and potential recruits may earn a bonus up to $2,000 by signing up during the three-day event. Qualified applicants may also be eligible for bonuses up to $40,000 or student loan reimbursement up to $65,000, depending on the selected occupation, test scores, contract length, and timeline for shipping to basic training.

There is currently a lot of focus to fill certain combat arms positions, Muth said, but there is also a need in the linguist, cyber, and health care career fields, among others.

Army National Guard recruiters, who operate separately from USAREC, will also be participating in the total force event. “At the end of the day, it’s one Army,” he said.

The general said his command got the idea for the events from McDonald’s, which held a one-day hiring spree in 2011 designed to boost its employment by 7% by hiring 50,000 people.

While he understands the Army is not a fast-food chain, the general said the concept can still generate high-quality applicants and it has support from senior leaders.

The Army is allowed to enlist up to 4% of those who fall under Category IV, people who have scored between the 10th and 31st percentile on the pre-enlistment aptitude test. Last year, the service only recruited 1.8% in that category and Muth expects a similar small figure this year.

“We’re not going to change our waivers. We’re not going to change the quality that’s coming in,” Muth said. “I think there is plenty [of eligible recruits] out there to put in boots to fill our ranks.”

By the end of this fiscal year, he expects the Army to sign between 63,000 to 66,000 new recruits. More importantly, he said, is the service’s end-strength goal of 485,000, which also accounts for retention that has been “very high” as more Soldiers decide to stay in longer amid an uncertain civilian job market.

“It’s going to be close, but I think we’re going to make our mission this year,” he said, adding the Army will definitely meet its end-strength goal.

Any new recruits added over the end-strength goal will go toward the next fiscal year.

“It helps start the engine for the next year,” he said, “because we don’t want to exceed end strength. It’s a bill and we have to pay for it.”
Diverse organization

Muth also mentioned the command’s ongoing focus on 22 cities, where there has been more outreach after past recruiting efforts did not perform well.

The Army had typically received large numbers of applicants from the “crooked smile” -- a line that stretches from Richmond, Virginia, to Phoenix and everything south of it, he said.

Meanwhile, other cities such as Boston, New York City, Chicago, Milwaukee and Kansas City saw lower numbers.

“We were including them, but not at the percentage that we should have based on the qualified [potential recruits] available in that area,” he said.

Last year, recruiting percentages increased up to 18% across those 22 cities after the program started in 2018, he added.

By targeting those areas, the Army can continue to be diverse. Today, minorities comprise about half of the force. Also, when looking at the social-economic levels where recruits come from, nearly half are from the middle class and the other half evenly split between the high and low sides, he said.

While his command has not seen any significant dips in recruiting due to the recent protests of racial injustice, Muth reminded potential recruits that the Army has zero tolerance for racism or discrimination.

“And the second something like that is seen or heard, or whatever impression you may get, it is immediately addressed by the chain of command,” he said. “It has to [be]. That’s the only way we can operate and we will continue to do so.”

https://www.army.mil/article/236719/all_army_personnel_veterans_asked_to_be_recruiters_next_week

Veterans

Rob Ortt named state Senate minority leader; pledges to be ‘voice of opposition’

Buffalo News, June 20, 2020:

ALBANY – Trying to jump-start their political misfortunes that have landed them deep into the political minority at the state Capitol, Senate Republicans on Friday afternoon named Sen. Rob Ortt, a North Tonawanda resident, their new conference leader.

Ortt, 41, conservative on fiscal and social issues and a former North Tonawanda mayor, spent eight years in the New York Army National Guard including combat service in Afghanistan.
The third-term lawmaker takes over for John Flanagan, a Suffolk County Republican who is leaving office next week for a job with a health care network. Flanagan had been majority leader – giving him a seat at the negotiating table with the governor and Assembly leader – before Democrats took over the Senate last year.

The 22-member Senate GOP conference was set to hold a private phone conference Friday afternoon that had intended to be a vote-counting and arm-twisting session. But Ortt's main competitor – Patrick Gallivan, an Elma Republican – dropped out of the internal campaign at 11 a.m. Friday.

Ortt has pledged to work to try to retake seats lost in the 2018 elections by Republicans in this fall's general election, though few believe the GOP – given the state’s demographic changes and campaign financial advantages enjoyed by Senate Democrats – will be able to win back control of the upper legislative chamber.

Ortt said he talked with Gallivan this morning about the quick campaign. Flanagan, who previously announced he was not running for re-election this fall, surprised his colleagues earlier this week when he said his last day on the job will be June 28.

“He’s conducted himself with integrity through this process,” Ortt said of Gallivan, adding he now looks forward “to have a unified conference going forward.”

Ortt and Gallivan share a common vision: that one-party Democratic control of all branches of government in Albany has driven all decision-making to New York City-dominated officials who have turned the state increasingly to the left.

“One party control in Albany has given New York State more spending, made it more difficult to do business and has made our communities less safe,” Gallivan said in ending his challenge to Ortt.

The only other candidate who expressed interest was Senator Andrew Lanza, a Staten Island Republican; he backed Ortt Thursday night.

In a 63-member chamber, the minority leader has little influence over the state budget or what bills make it onto the floor for passage. Ortt, who has become increasingly vocal on the Senate floor in the past year or so, will be the face of the GOP opposition in Albany to both Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and Assembly and Senate Democratic leaders.

"We congratulate him," said Mike Murphy, a spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, a Westchester County Democrat.

In addition to his base Senate pay of $110,000, Ortt will get a stipend, known in Albany as “Lulus,” of $34,500 annually.

The rise to the head of the Senate GOP conference is a steep climb for Ortt from just three years ago when he was indicted in a Niagara County corruption scandal – a case that was later tossed out by a state judge.
Ortt has been a sharp critic of Cuomo and his policies, a route some Republicans have been reluctant to take given the years the Democratic governor did not do much to help Democrats win control of the Senate. With Democrats about to ride a blue wave in the 2018 elections, that coziness between Cuomo and the GOP senators evaporated earlier that year.

Ortt said Senate Republicans will not be politically afraid to take on Cuomo and challenge his decisions; he cited GOP opposition to the ongoing power Cuomo inherited for himself when he declared a Covid-19 emergency – a move in which he has been able to cancel and make new laws, as well as bypass usual oversight mechanisms for state spending on any assortment of health and other expenses.

“We’re going to be a strong voice of opposition,” Ortt said in an interview Friday.

The Niagara County resident, who is married with no children, is the youngest member of the current Senate GOP conference.

Ortt said the pitch he made to his fellow senators for their support was to serve as a change agent who will speak out forcefully against “an increasingly radical left moving the Democratic Party.”

He added: “We need to present our vision for alternative governance in the state of New York … When the Senate web to Democrats, we lost balance in this state. That’s why you’ve seen this deluge of liberal policy go through.”

Ortt said the Senate Republicans need more women in leadership positions and more women elected to the Senate.

“I also intend to recruit minorities. You’re not going to tell me there’s not African American or Latino conservatives out there … We’re going to find those folks and bring them into the party and run them for office. They share our values,” he said.

The past couple of Senate leadership battles – won by Flanagan for majority leader and again when he was tapped for minority leader – created divisive splits within the GOP conference. Gallivan last week pledged he would not be a part of efforts that divided the small group of lawmakers who are pressing to hold current seats and possibly regain seats lost on Long Island and the Hudson Valley in 2018.

The voters in the Ortt victory was a small number. Some outside forces, however, tried to stir the pot. State GOP Chairman Nick Langworthy, according to multiple sources, phoned senators on behalf of Gallivan – a move that did not work and which angered some Ortt supporters.

Langworthy was a key supporter of Sen. Chris Jacobs, a Buffalo Republican who is running for a U.S. House seat in the 27th District in next week’s special election. Ortt had sought that congressional post and bowed out to Jacobs.

Ortt said he did not talk to Langworthy during the internal Senate GOP process over the past several days. “I have every confidence that he will work with me and we will work together because we have to,” Ortt said of Langworthy.
In a statement Friday, Langworthy said he is “thrilled” that Ortt is the new Senate GOP leader. “Rob is a fighter who knows how to win tough battles, and that’s exactly what’s needed as we fight to win back control of the state Senate and put an end to Cuomo’s dictatorial reign and the extreme policies that are destroying this state,” the GOP chairman said.

Ortt attended Canisius College; he joined the military after the 2001 terrorist attacks, and served in Afghanistan from March until December in 2008. He was elected mayor of North Tonawanda in 2010 and became a state senator in 2015 after George Maziarz retired from the Senate.

In 2017, Ortt was among several Niagara County Republicans caught up in a corruption probe at the time by then-Attorney General Eric Schneiderman involving alleged no-show jobs and other irregularities. Ortt was indicted in the matter following allegations that GOP officials created a no-show job for his wife, Meghan, in order to help make up for a drop in the family income when Ortt became North Tonawanda mayor after leaving as city clerk.

The three felony counts were later tossed by a state judge in Albany who ruled there was insufficient evidence that Ortt broke any laws; and Ortt accused Schneiderman, who since resigned in disgrace after being accused by several women of physical abuse, of running a politically motivated prosecution.

Ortt is more conservative than some of his downstate GOP colleagues or those the party has getting ready to run for seats won by Democrats in 2018. The senator said his voting record reflects not only his personal and political beliefs but the views of his constituents.

“Certainly, as leader, you have to speak and represent all your members. As leader, I’m certainly going to be vocal, where appropriate, but my primary goal is my conference and growing my conference,” he said Friday.


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**Services held for Dennis Fagan, 73, retired Sayville HS teacher and Army National Guard general**

**Greater Long Island.com, June 24, 2020**:

Dennis J. Fagan, a retired Sayville schools teacher and major general in the U.S. Army National Guard, died peacefully on June 19, having battled against a rare form of blood cancer.

Funeral services for Fagan, 73, are Wednesday, 2-5 p.m. and 7-9 p.m., and Thursday, 2-5 p.m. and 7-9 p.m., at Mangano Funeral Home in Middle Island, located at 640 Middle Country Road.
A funeral mass will be celebrated Friday at 10 a.m. in St. Mark’s Roman Catholic Church in Shoreham, 105 Randall Road.

Fagan worked as a technology teacher at Sayville High School and in the Half Hollow Hills school district for more than three decades, while also advising the development of the school yearbooks.

After he retired from teaching, the Bronx native and SUNY Oswego graduate continued advising the yearbook staff at Sayville High School. He also supervised SUNY Oswego students who worked as student teachers at many Long Island schools.

The son of a U.S. Army brigadier general, Fagan’s second career was as a U.S. Army National Guardsman. He served in the guard for nearly 30 years, retiring with the rank of major general.

Fagan started his National Guard career as a private in a signal company in Syracuse while studying at SUNY Oswego. After graduation from the college, he transferred to the 7th Regiment Armory on Park Avenue in New York City and to the 1st Battalion 107th Infantry — a unit his father, grandfather and grand uncle had proudly served previously.

Across a distinguished military career, Fagan supported, planned and executed various combat, combat support and logistics exercises, and prepared plans and trained for civilian and state government disaster control and recovery operations.

Fagan is survived by his wife Jane; his four children and their families, Jennifer and Dave Tomforde, Timothy Nina Fagan, Keri and Michael McLaughlin and Kelly Fagan; eight grandchildren, Dylan, Jackson, Carter and Olivia Tomforde, Cali and Luke Fagan and Aiden and Ryan McLaughlin. He is also survived by his two brothers, Lt. Colonel Dudley Fagan and Dr. Kevin Fagan, and his sister Barbara Young.


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