

2026 GOVERNOR'S EXEMPLARY VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD



AWARDEES:

David & Shirley Drake



David and Shirley Drake are recognized as a collective force for good in the community. David's passing a year ago was a grave loss to the community in Litchfield, NY. David was born in 1945 and was a lifelong New Yorker. After other jobs in the trades, he worked at Remington for 20 years.

David served in the Army Reserves for 23 years, working in tank maintenance, as a cook and riot control during the Vietnam years. His life experience made him the go-to handyman for many older adults in the community. David refused payment. He built accessibility ramps, repaired appliances, mowed lawns, plowed driveways for older adults, and put a new roof on the Cedar Lake Church.

As a team, David and Shirley volunteered to assist with the Ilion Little Theater: David worked on sets and made repairs at the

theater and Shirley sewed costumes. Shirley and David also coached baseball for twelve years. For sixteen years, David was state director of the North American 40 PLUS Touring Riders. For twenty more years, he served as the international assistant director and raised funds for the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation. Shirley served as the secretary. Shirley and David volunteered for the Senior Club where Shirley was the president. Shirley and David also volunteered at the Federated Church Food Bank. His last day at the food bank was right before his death.

David and Shirley found a way to give back to their community for their entire adult lives. They would have celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 2026.

"Just do it," Shirley says about volunteering. "You will feel better about yourself."



**Office for
the Aging**

Kathy Hochul, Governor
Greg Olsen, Director

AWARDEE:

George Gullis Herkimer County



George Gullis wears many hats, including his service to the First Presbyterian Church. He watches out for everyone around him. One of his greatest concerns is providing food for the hungry. Several years ago, he started a free bag lunch program for anyone needing a lunch. There is no requirement for this lunch – only a name and address. The lunch comes with a sandwich, fruit cup, chips and dessert. What started out with only a few lunches has now grown to about 85 sandwiches twice a week.

Another food program he instituted is a free hot supper twice a month, currently serving an average of 100 people each meal. This includes a main entrée accompanied by vegetables, potatoes, dessert, beverage and (sometimes) a salad.

Gullis has a bountiful heart. He helps families in need – whether it be cash for delinquent bills or gas for the car or groceries to feed a person’s family. He has been known to purchase groceries for people in desperate situations and even help with any repairs they need done around the house.

Being a long-time landlord, he can fix just about anything. He uses his vehicle to give people rides to and from meals, the grocery store or medical visits – all free of charge. His calm manner and listening ear bring comfort and smiles to all he helps. He hasn’t met a task too big when it comes to helping his fellow man.

Gullis said, “Focus on the individual that you are helping and you will make a difference.”



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