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## COUNTY CLERK HELPS THOUSANDTH VETERAN IRAQ-WAR MARINE VET PUBLICLY THANKED BY JAGOW & MARINE LEGISLATOR

LOCKPORT—For Niagara County Clerk Wayne F. Jagow, a goal of boosting the number of veterans recording their discharge paperwork with his office has turned into a mission to find an appropriate way to say thank you to those who have served their country.

The scope of Jagow's mission—and his success to date—became apparent during an early morning visit by Marine Cpl. Charles Reese.

Reese, an honorably discharged veteran of the Iraq War, is the 1,000<sup>th</sup> veteran to sign up for Jagow's unique "Thank a Vet" program—an effort that has been copied by other county clerks, including former Erie County Clerk Kathy Hochul, who introduced her smaller-scale "Return the FAVOR" program modeled on the Jagow-created "Thank a Vet."

Jagow's Thank a Vet program provides veterans that record their DD-214 form, the military's discharge paperwork, at the Niagara County Clerk's office with access to discounts from approximately 140 area merchants.

"It was absolutely remarkable being able to have as our 1,000<sup>th</sup> veteran this fine young man coming back from the Iraq War," Jagow said. "It's really one of the best things that I think we've done in the Clerk's Office to not only say thank you to the vets for their service, but to give them something concrete."

Jagow noted that his program has helped veterans ranging in age from men and women that served in World War II up to veterans of the current Global War on Terror, and observed that seeing the young veterans is bittersweet for his office.

"Especially for the young people that are coming back right now, this is an opportunity to help them as far as reestablishing themselves within our community," Jagow said. "We are doing something within this county of not only recognizing our veterans, but saying thank you."

Jagow's program, which launched late last winter, has seen a groundswell of support not just from veterans taking advantage of the patriotic clerk's efforts, but from the offerings coming from the local business community.

"I think it's fantastic that the businesses have supported this, because we have really just been up and running for a short period of time," Jagow said. "The businesses that we have that have responded and supported this cross the full spectrum: services, restaurants, financial services, builders, dentists, doctors, lawyers—it crosses everything you could imagine. And they're just opening their doors to the veterans."

Jagow and Reese were joined by Niagara County Legislator Dave Godfrey, R-Wilson. The first-term lawmaker is a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War, and came to both honor his fellow Marine, Reese, and to congratulate Jagow.

"As a veteran, I really appreciate what Wayne has done," Godfrey said. "As a Vietnam veteran, however, this really was a long-awaited thank you. I'm glad that, thanks to Wayne's efforts, veterans like Charles Reese are getting the thanks they have earned."

Godfrey was among the first 1,000 recipients of the Thank a Vet card himself.

Reese also praised Jagow's efforts, saying, "The program's awesome."

"I came down and got the card, and it was great," Reese said. "I'd tell my fellow veterans to definitely check it out. It's a good service to us. They're actually giving us a thank you, rather than just a handshake and a welcome home."

Reese noted that for soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines drawing down after deployments that lasted in some cases more than a year, an extra effort was sometimes needed to rejoin the larger community.

"Everybody says thank you, and I thank them," Reese said. "But this program is different. It's helping out a lot of veterans and a lot of their families who are having a hard time getting back into civilian life and adjusting."

For more information on the Thank a Vet program, call 716-439-7022, or visit the Thank a Vet portal on the web at [www.niagaracounty.com/ThankAVet.asp](http://www.niagaracounty.com/ThankAVet.asp).

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