



AWARDEE:

Robert Wheeler **Steuben County**

After retiring from the Veterans Administration Medical Center, Robert Wheeler has immersed himself in a life of service to veterans. He is currently one of two ride captains in the Southern Tier for the Patriot Guard and an American Legion Rider. Bob is a state trustee of the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks and a past state veterans chairman. Bob serves as the Elk's Veterans Administration Voluntary Service (VAVS) representative, with a territory spanning from Jamestown to Ithaca. He says that he likes this role because he can help direct funding to support local veterans' needs. To further demonstrate his commitment, Bob drives the VA medical transport bus, assisting veterans living in isolated, rural areas to needed medical appointments. Bob's commitment to veterans spans nationally. For the past 20 years, he has participated in the Rolling Thunder Ride. This annual motorcycle rally held on Memorial Day brings hundreds of thousands of veterans to the Mall in Washington, D.C., to remember POW and MIA veterans. In 2014, Bob was one of 457 individuals invited to the "National Reading of the Names." The annual event remembers those who have fallen in the wars since 9/11. At this event, he had the honor to follow General David Petraeus, who read the names of those lost from the 101st Airborne Division. Bob recently received an invitation from the National Parks Service, inviting him to participate in the cleaning/handwashing of the Vietnam War Memorial on Memorial Day weekend this year.

Bob was born in his grandmother's house in Osceola, PA, but lived most of his life in Steuben County, NY. After graduating from high school, he enlisted with the Army during the Vietnam War and trained as a medic. Upon completion of his training, he was selected to continue training as a lab technician and served the remainder of his enlistment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. After completing his enlistment, Bob returned to Steuben County. He met his wife, Frieda, and together raised two children, Nicole and Jack. Both Bob and Frieda retired from the VA Medical Center in Bath; Bob was the facility manager. Frieda, who began her career as a nurse, retired as the domiciliary manager. It was essential to both of them to raise their family, which now includes a set of twins and a set of triplets grandchildren, with an appreciation for service to others, especially veterans.