



## COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by SuperSourceMedia.com

Toys for Tots is a well-known phrase here in the Capital District. As one of the most popular holiday charitable causes in the area, the name is almost synonymous with the holiday itself. But most of us don't know the story of the man behind this successful organization.

Albert (Vinny) Roman, Jr. grew up in Brooklyn, NY, often playing baseball and traveling to visit family in Puerto Rico every summer. He knew he needed to find a way out of the inner city when he could. "I wasn't interested in becoming another 'statistic,'" he says. So in 1996, he decided to join the United States Marine Corps. He began his military career as a rifleman, spending the majority of his career in Camp LeJeune in North Carolina. He went on to serve two tours in Iraq, one in Afghanistan, and also served one tour in recruiting duty in New York City. He was meritoriously promoted each time from rank of E2 through the rank of E6. While in New York City, he was also awarded the Leadership Award for running an extremely successful recruiting sub station and winning recruiter of the year two consecutive years in a row. Television's incomparable Betty White presented him the award herself. It was a special moment. "She was exactly as she is on TV – full of life and

brightens up the room with laughter," says Vinny.

During his last duty before retirement, Vinny was assigned as the Chief Operating Officer for Fox Company 2nd Battalion 25th Marines out of Glenville, NY. After his retirement, the Romans decided to stay in the area because they had seen what a wonderful community it was.

Vinny's background training is in logistics and operations, and sales and development. He also has experience in assisting businesses with creating processes to help streamline their companies, as well as in running non-profits.

As part of his collateral duties with Fox Company 2nd Battalion 25th Marines, he was tasked with running the Toys for Tots campaign and finding ways to make it more efficient. Since then, the reserve center has been closed, but Vinny continues to run the campaign as a civilian. During the last nine years, Vinny and his team have taken the campaign from 60,000 kids and \$40,000 to now over 160,000 kids and 3.2 million dollars in donations.

"Every year we partner with hundreds of 501C3 organizations so that we can maximize the amount of exposure and grow a bigger reach into the communities. We have almost 800 businesses that are drop box locations, collecting toys throughout the Capital Region. We could



Toys for Tots, has made his name known throughout the area, and he is grateful to have received awards for the Latino 40 Under 40, as well as the Albany Business Review 40 Under 40 within a year from each other.

As much as he loves his work, his number one passion in life is his family. "They are my everything," he says. "I am at my happiest when I am with them." Together with his wife of 22 years, Johanna, their home includes their daughter, Alyssa (14) and their son, Adrien (11), as well as three Malteses – Dollar (17!) and Snowball & Sparky (5). The whole family donates their time to Toys for Tots. Johanna has been Mrs. Claus on the annual Toys for Tots train for the last couple of years, and the kids assist in the warehouse. Alyssa also is a goalie for the school's lacrosse team and Adrien is a catcher for his baseball team through the Babe Ruth League out of Scotia-Glenville. Vinny is a coach for the league as well and enjoys the extra time it affords him with his son.

Besides working together on Toys for Tots, the family enjoys spending time together swimming and out on their jet skis on Sacandaga Lake. Vinny tries to get out to hike on the many beautiful mountains in the area whenever he can. He is also an excellent cook and typically enjoys making Latin food, rice, beans and pork chops, but he's really known for his chili!

He is thankful everyday that he gets to work with his wife by his side while doing something that is so important to the area. "We see the 'good' in giving it back," he says, and he's happy to serve his community after already serving the country.

*For more information on how you can become a volunteer with Toys for Tots, or to donate a toy, become a sponsor, host a drop box, or to request toys, visit [www.capitalregiontoysfortots.org](http://www.capitalregiontoysfortots.org).* ■

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not have completed the mission without the help of all the emergency service units and first responders, the Marine Corps League O'Brien detachment, SEFCU, Dunkin Donuts and Auto Solutions, to name just a few."

Vinny says that every year is a new year filled with new obstacles and challenges, but many rewards as well. Their biggest challenge is not having a permanent warehouse location to use as a home base as the campaign continues to grow exponentially each year. They are also always in need of toy donations, sponsors, volunteers and drop box locations as the program continues to grow.

Vinny loves being able to give back to the community. He says it's an honor "being placed in a position so that I can influence others to bring joy to those less fortunate than myself, and bringing joy to the children of our communities on Christmas morning."

Toys for Tots is not the only charitable organization Vinny gives his time to. He was also the Chief Operating Officer for the Eastern NY American Red Cross. He has volunteered in support of relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and also aided in hurricane relief in both Florida and Puerto Rico. In addition, he is involved with the Unified Military Affairs Council. His involvement within the community, and especially with



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