



Paul Toomey Veteran Volunteer

By Jenna Caputo | Photos by Mary Flores Photography & Contributed by the Toomey Family

Paul Toomey always had a love for the outdoors. Born and raised in Watervliet, he spent his early days playing with many neighborhood friends, participating in sports, and spending weekends with his family at Cossayuna Lake. His passion for the outdoors and wildlife began at the lake, where he hunted and fished with his father and grandfather and explored all the wildlife surrounding the area. He loved it so much that he eventually graduated SUNY Morrisville with a degree in Natural Resource Conservation and Forestry Management. However, his wildlife career had to be put on hold. Drafted into the Army in 1969, Paul attended Basic Training and Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Dix in NJ before being deployed to Vietnam for a year. He initially served with the 82nd Airborne, then with the 4th Infantry Division as Machine Gunner and Squad Leader. “While serving overseas in Vietnam, you spent your time serving in close quarters with guys and developed trusts and friendships that are hard to explain unless you were there,” says Paul. “I have many memories of these times—both good and bad—and am proud

of serving with so many brave and loyal men and women, and those memories have stayed with me my whole life.” After he returned to the US, Paul spent six months at Fort Carson in Colorado as a Squad Leader on Mechanized Track Vehicle before being honorably discharged in January of 1971. He was proud to follow his father’s footsteps as a veteran. As a WWII Navy veteran, Paul’s dad was in a ship on the way to Pearl Harbor during the December 7th attack. Fortunately, they had just left California and were still out at sea when it happened.

After returning home, Paul went to work on the assembly line for Ford Motor Company in Green Island. One day, Paul took his mother out to lunch from her job as a Traffic Manager at Simmons Fasteners in Menands. When he dropped her back off, he met Bonnie, who was then an Administration Assistant at the same place. It was fate. Celebrating their 51st wedding anniversary next month, Paul and Bonnie now have two children: Jason, who works at the Watervliet Arsenal, and Jaime, who has a residential cleaning and interior painting business. Jaime and her husband, Jamison, live here in Clifton Park with their daughter, Tori



(13). Tori loves to fish with her grandpa, and he says she casts a spinning rod as good as anyone he knows.

Bonnie has a passion for gourmet cooking, having initially learned from her mother and now carrying on many of Paul's mother's old recipes. "Bonnie makes the best pies you will ever taste!" he says. "She is always trying something new on me and our family and she never disappoints." Bonnie loves to





spend her time cooking, hanging with their granddaughter, or shopping, but if you don't find her there, you might find her in the cryo chamber or sauna at I Cryo here in Clifton Park. The Toomeys are a cat family, owning cats for over 40 years now. Their current cat, Sully, is four years old and a lover—never far from Bonnie's side. "He is the only cat I have ever had that doesn't scratch, hiss, or bite!" says Paul.

Paul ended up staying in manufacturing, working his way up and eventually becoming the Factory Manager at three different locations. In 1998, their family relocated to Columbia, SC for his job before Paul retired in 2010. Two years later, they moved back home to Clifton Park to be closer to their kids. Since then, Paul has spent his time volunteering. In 2012, he joined the Saratoga National Cemetery Honor Guard Association, serving on the Wednesday Honor Guard Squad. The Association is an all-volunteer group of military veterans who have been providing Military Funeral Honor for honorably discharged veterans since 1999. This service is available five days a week year-round. They're always looking for new members, and information about joining can be found at snchga.org.

Paul is also a life member at VFW Post 1498 in Clifton Park and has been the Quartermaster since 2016. With a mission to support vets and their families as well as assistance for community events in Clifton Park and Halfmoon, the VFW also aids military units deployed overseas. Through the VFW's Adopt a Unit program, Post 1498 has adopted a unit with a commanding officer who is also a member of their post. The unit is from the US Army Fighting 69th, deployed to Africa. They will receive monthly



care packages with supplies from the unit's list of needs. It is a way to remind them that everyone at home appreciates the sacrifices they and their families are making for us.

The VFW also has a program called UNMET NEEDS, which supplies grants to military families going through hardships. Over \$5.6 million has been awarded nationwide since 2004. Currently, the VFW is holding their Patriot Pen contest, looking for winning 300- or 400-word essays on this year's theme of My Salute to Our Veterans. The winning entries receive a cash prize and then are forwarded to the district competition. Winners from there move up to the state, and eventually the national VFW, where they can win up to \$5,000.

Each year, the Post also hosts their annual clothing drive for the Stratton VA Medical Center, providing winter clothes to ensure no vet leaves without something warm to wear for the season. Anyone in the community can help with the cause. If you would like to donate new clothing, contact Michael Fitzpatrick at 518-626-5506 or Dom Dominguez at the Center for Development and Civic Engagement at the Stratton Medical Center for more information.

In addition to these other events, Post 1498 is hosting a Poppy Drive on November 11 & 12 at the Market 32 in Clifton Park



and Fred the Butcher. All proceeds go to local veterans and their families. With a motto of “No one does more for veterans,” their VFW post is constantly active in trying to help where they can, and they always need new members. “Even if you cannot be an active member due to job or family responsibilities, we encourage eligible veterans to join and help when you can,” says Paul. “There are many benefits out there for veterans, and we can help put you in contact with the right people to get them.” Paul is proud of all the work they do and is especially grateful to the Town of Clifton Park and Saratoga County for awarding them \$17,000 in grants to complete the badly-needed repairs that were put off due to the pandemic.

Over the years, Paul has traveled to many places for work, fun, and service. In addition to various destinations in the US, he’s also been to places like England, Italy, and Mexico. He spent six weeks in England to help start a new manufacturing operation location and really enjoyed the history of the country. “Everything is so much older than in our country, and there was so much to see,” he says. In the past, Paul and Bonnie often traveled to Aruba and Cancun during the winter months, but lately, have been keeping it more local. Every year for their anniversary, they go to the Mirror Lake Inn in Lake Placid to celebrate.

When he’s not volunteering, Paul is often found outside fishing, hunting, or golfing. He’s also an avid reader and especially loves to read history, crime novels, and books on the Vietnam War. However, spending time with his granddaughter is his favorite activity of all. If he can’t do that, then he and Bonnie just might be found watching “The Bold and the Beautiful” every day after dinner with Sully. They enjoy seeing a movie or eating out occasionally, but Bonnie’s cooking has spoiled Paul since her meals always end up tasting better. However, he’s looking forward to his upcoming trip with his sister to visit their brother



in North Carolina. Paul plans on playing golf and visiting with some of his old work friends while they’re down south.

Paul is grateful for his experiences over the years and feels lucky to continue volunteering to help other veterans and current military families as much as he can. “I have always been proud of my time served in the service of our country, and being a veteran is something that you carry with you for life. Many of the experiences I had while serving I was able to use throughout my personal and working life.”

For more information about joining VFW Post 1498, visit vfw1498.org or follow them on Facebook.

