

# 'It's so humbling:' St. Johns County man inducted into Florida Veterans Hall of Fame

*Retired Sgt. Maj. Ray Quinn: 'It's so humbling'*



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St. Augustine Record

July 19, 2022



Anyone who has been to the Memorial Day service in downtown St. Augustine has probably seen retired U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Ray Quinn.

Quinn, who devotes much of his time to serving veterans, recites his poem, "Tribute to a Fallen Comrade," at Memorial Day and Veterans Day services. He has also read the piece at funerals for Florida National Guardsmen who died in the Middle East, he said.

"It's very emotional for me," he said.

Quinn retired from the Florida National Guard in 1995 after 30 years of service. Since then, he's been a force in the community for veterans, including helping to establish and lead the Veterans Council of St. Johns County.

Because of his work, Gov. Ron DeSantis and his cabinet unanimously voted to include Quinn in the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame this year along with 14 other veterans. Now his name is among other Hall of Fame inductees on a plaque inside the Capitol rotunda, he said.

Quinn, 76, lives in St. Johns County with his wife, Addrenne. The couple spoke with The Record at his home about the Hall of Fame honor and his life.

"I'm a really small-town guy. Came from Umatilla. ... Graduated from a high school class of 30 students. And to come from that environment to a statewide honor ... it's so humbling. I couldn't believe it," he said.

That group of inductees into the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame include retired members of the Air Force, Navy, Marines and Army.

"The Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame recognizes and honors those military veterans who, through their works and lives during or after military service, have made a significant contribution to the State of Florida through civic, business, public service or other pursuits," according to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. "It is not a traditional military hall of fame, as it focuses on post-military contributions to the State of Florida."

## **'A patriot' from a young age**

Quinn's office is full of military memorabilia, memories and awards, including The Legion of Merit Medal and The Florida Distinguished Service Medal. A photo of his father training during World War II hangs on one wall.

"I think I've been a patriot since I was a Boy Scout, and I love America and the flag just like some corny old guy in a movie, I guess," Quinn said. "And everything I did that touched the public, like serving in hurricane duty, hauling water to a town that had lost their water

supply, meeting and greeting the people and having them show their appreciation, I love that."

He said he couldn't have achieved what he has without the support of others, including his wife, Addrenne. The two met while in high school in Umatilla.

"She was working for her aunt who had a little restaurant in town. She was a server ... and I used to eat there for lunch. I worked for a local grocery store," he said.

"He'd get extra portions, of course," Addrenne Quinn said.

"(We) started dating and then we got married a couple of years later," he said.

The Quinns have two daughters, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Quinn became a citizen soldier in 1965 while working another job, according to the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Society. He began working full time in the Florida Army National Guard as a parts clerk in 1973 and climbed the ranks.

The guard transferred him to St. Johns County in 1985, he said. Here, his role included overseeing training for guardsmen to make sure they were combat ready and that their skills were "equal to those who serve out in the field," Quinn said.

The Florida Army National Guard prepares units for combat and other support services for federal military operations. It also "provides protection of life, property and preserves peace, order and public safety" at the state level and can be used to support civil defense, disaster relief and other missions, according to the Florida National Guard.

After retiring from the Florida National Guard, Quinn worked for the Florida Department of Military Affairs, including serving as director of executive services. He worked on the adjutant general's staff. He is retired from that role.

Retired Florida Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Michael Fleming nominated Quinn for the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame, Quinn said.

Quinn, a former St. Johns County commissioner, is one of the founding members of the Veterans Council of St. Johns County. The nonprofit launched more than 20 years ago to support the needs of veterans. He is vice chair of the organization.

In addition to serving with the Veterans Council and reading the "Tribute to a Fallen Comrade," Quinn has honored veterans in other ways.

"Several times each year, St. Johns County suffers the loss of a veteran that has no next of kin. Upon these occasions, the county verifies their service and arranges for interment at the Jacksonville National Cemetery," according to the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame Society. "The Veterans Council of St. Johns County has a policy that no veteran goes home alone. Sgt. Maj. Quinn volunteers to conduct a graveside service for every veteran that has no family."

## **Homelessness is 'the biggest crisis'**

When Quinn and others launched the Veterans Council of St. Johns County, they wanted to provide a place for veterans to get help or meet with other veterans. He said Bill Dudley, current chair of the Veterans Council, has transformed the organization.

Now the nonprofit has funds "readily available" to help needy veterans, Quinn said. The organization is now focused on getting housing for homeless veterans, among other causes, he said.

"The biggest crisis we have in supporting veterans are homeless veterans," he said. "We wind up placing them in local motels for maybe up to three days, and that's the best we can do. There is no center, no place to send them except for the motels."

Another challenge is getting younger veterans involved in the Veterans Council, Quinn said.

"My contemporaries are in their 70s and their 80s, and when we look in the rearview mirror, we don't see anybody coming to take our place," Quinn said. "And that's what we need these youngsters to do today."