2011 Tom Paine Winter Soldier Peace and Justice Awards Dinner

Thanks everyone for turning out. It was a great evening and lots of fun.

Paz, John

The 2011 Tom Paine Winter Soldier Peace and Justice Awards Dinner will be held on Tuesday, October 18 from 5:30 to 9:00 PM, Casa Mia Restaurant in Glenmont, NY (385 Rt. 9W, Glenmont). Please sign up early by contacting Dan Wilcox. This year’s honorees are Mary Finneran, Tarak Kauff and Larry Wittner. Veterans for Peace has kept the cost down so dinner is still $30 per person. Advance reservation required as Casa Mia requires advance notification of the number attending. Reservations may be made by contacting Dan Wilcox by Oct 7, 2011. Please let Dan know early if you possibly can and this will help our planning with the restaurant greatly. Contact Dan at: 518-482-0262 or dwlcox@earthlink.net. Please make your check out to Veterans For Peace (on the memo line please write Awards Dinner) and mail to: Dan Wilcox, 280 S. Main Ave., Albany, NY 12208

About Our Honorees

Larry Wittner commenced his career as a peace activist in the fall of 1961, when he and other college students picketed the White House in an attempt to block resumption of U.S. nuclear weapons testing. During the next fifty years, he participated in large numbers of peace movement ventures, including leading the annual march for nuclear disarmament through the streets of Hiroshima. In 2005, he began serving on the national board of Peace Action, the largest peace organization in the United States. He also serves on the executive committee of Peace Action’s state and local affiliates. More recently, he joined the national board of another peace-oriented organization, the National Priorities Project, and helped to launch a Veterans for Peace project, the restoration of the sailing ship, the Golden Rule, which once challenged nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean. Larry has also been active in the racial equality and labor movements – in fact, he’s the executive secretary of the Albany County Central Federation of Labor – and performs (instrumentally and vocally) with the Solidarity Singers at peace and social justice gatherings.

After attending Columbia College, the University of Wisconsin, and Columbia University (where he received his Ph.D.), Larry taught history at Hampton Institute, at Vassar College, at Japanese universities (under the Fulbright program), and at the State University of New York/Albany, where he is now professor of history emeritus. He is the author or editor of eleven books, as well as the author of about 200 published articles and book reviews, mostly on peace movements and foreign policy. Scholarly organizations have awarded him prizes for a number of these publications, including his three volume work, The Struggle Against the Bomb. An abbreviated version of this trilogy, Confronting the Bomb, is now available. As might be expected, Larry is a well-known historian and a former president of the Council on Peace Research in History (now the Peace History Society), an affiliate of the American Historical Association. His memoirs, entitled Working for Peace and Justice, will be published in 2012.

Tarak Kauff “We need real and significant revolutionary change so that future generations can inherit a planet that is not continuously devastated by wars, poverty and environmental destruction. This, as I see it, is the global mission of VFP. If we want to end wars, we have to radically change the system (not just the people) that produces war and poverty. We have seen through the lies. The U.S. is not a beacon of hope and freedom; for most it is quite the opposite. We need to build a revolutionary culture of resistance that is both national and global in nature and outlook. If we want to build our organization and change the world our mission must be broad and global. I am not interested in "breaking" the system here in the U.S. so it works a little better. It’s a cruel and inhumane system, a system that has always existed primarily to make the elite more powerful while disempowering and robbing the common people. Everything else is a myth. Since the beginning, the system has promoted wars for profit and empire that the common people have to fight, kill and die for. The way this corporate government system pursues wealth, strategic power and influence is destroying the earth. This has to change.”
Mary Finneran was born in Corning, NY and raised in Painted Post, located on the edge of Appalachia, to a family of six children, including her twin sister. She learned about poverty up-close and personal, some at home, some with kids up the road and with those riding on her school bus. Her childhood reading focused on Dickens who nurtured her sense of justice. She wanted to be a hippy and often greeted people with “Peace”, always including the hand sign. The Vietnam War ended while she was in high school and Mary though everything would be right with the world until she realized her generation was confused and dazed. She worried about nuclear power, wondering what to do about it. While in college studying art, Mary was able to save enough money to go to Europe taking along her sister. They lived on the streets of France and Italy where she was exposed to more poverty but saw solidarity among the people. Returning to the US, she became a welder and a member of the Sheet Metalworkers Union. She lamented the destruction of the air controllers union by Reagan even as her own union was decimated by a company merger, and she was laid off while jobs were moved to Mexico. It was time to return to art school where she became a certified teacher. Her year at graduate school was punctuated by Desert Storm. On the night the war started, Mary created “Peace Gets Angry” and joined a small war protest at Syracuse University. 9/11 was the wake-up call as she began her quest to understand her country and what it was doing. At a BNP meeting she viewed, “Loose Change” and realized we were building an empire. Mary has followed her passion for peace through participation in discussion groups - some radical ones - BNP events, rallies, petitioning for many causes such as single payer health insurance, Kucinich initiatives and anti-fracking. She has attended two major drone protests in Syracuse. She serves on BNP’s Coordinating Committee as well as that of Frack Busters, NY. Other memberships include UNAC, SPNY, Frack Free Catskills and SPAN. Mary is willing to speak out for truth in any venue, including grocery store lines! She strives to carry the message of activism, creative problem-solving and critical thinking to the next generation. She holds steadfastly to the vision of a nation of concerned and and active citizens without which she fears we are on the road to Dronedom. Mary and her husband, Mark, live in Cairo, NY. They share an interest in antiques.