

2018 Governor's Veterans Advocacy Award goes to Korean and Vietnam War Veteran

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — A Korea era, and Vietnam War veteran has been named the 2018 Governor's Veterans Advocacy Award winner.

Metlakatla resident Solomon (Sol) Atkinson received the award during a Ceremony Held at the David Leask Memorial Town hall in Metlakatala. Director of the State Office of Veterans Affairs Verdie Bowen, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Alaska Army National Guard COL Wayne Don, and the Deputy Director of the State Office of Veterans Affairs Forrest Powell, III, presented the award to Atkinson.

"Sol is a humble advocate for all veterans. He is quietly involved in countless organizations, always serving his fellow veterans. It is often said that "every day is veterans day" in Sol's eyes, that is certainly the truth," Bowen said. "Sol is a plank holder in our Tribal Veterans Program and he was directly involved in the establishment of the Alaska VA/Native Health Care Sharing agreements allowing veterans to receive quality care in their own communities it was a great honor this year to publicly recognize his continued service to the veteran community".

Solomon "Sol" Atkinson has dedicated his life to service to his nation and his community. He served in the US Navy for 22 years, from 1951 to 1973. As a young seaman in 1953, Sol volunteered for the Navy's legendary Underwater Demolition Team, the precursor to the modern-day Navy SEALs. When President Kennedy created the first Navy SEAL team in 1962, Sol was selected as a member. He soon became a SEAL team training instructor, training new Navy SEAL recruits, and he also had the honor of training 48 astronauts— including Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Jim Lovell—in underwater weightlessness simulations. As a SEAL, Sol also completed three combat tours in Vietnam. His awards include the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

Since leaving active duty service, Sol has taken on important roles in his community, including being one of the most vocal veterans' advocates in Alaska. He has spent years reaching out to his fellow veterans to make sure they receive the benefits, honor, and dignity they have earned through service. Sol was instrumental in the founding of the Metlakatla Veterans Association in the early 90s; he has acted as president off and on throughout the organization's history and is currently the president. The group has become an important community institution, offering scholarships, participating in ceremonies, and conducting various other community support activities. When he served as the mayor of Metlakatla, Sol played a principle role in the creation of the local Veterans Hall and in 2014, Sol paved the way for the first Memorandum of Understanding to offer the first Native Veteran Direct Home Loan program in the State of Alaska.

Sol was unanimously selected for this award by members of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council.

"It is remarkable that Sol continues to serve today over 67 years after his initial enlisted in the Navy. His commitment to veterans and their families, Veteran Service Organizations, and many other groups makes him an exemplary recipient for this award", Bowen said.

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