

COVID nurse returns home to Island

**PHOTOS AND STORY BY
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Contributor

United States Air Force Reserve Capt. Tara Gensler, a clinical nurse in the 914th ASTS based at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, was in her Grand Island home last Saturday morning asking why her family wanted her to immediately join them outside.

Bewildered, she went along and wondered why a Grand Island Police vehicle was coming down Sheree Road with its lights on and siren blaring. Then she heard car horns as a slow parade of nearly 30 vehicles, decorated with balloons and signs, and carrying family, friends, local veterans and Town Supervisor John C. Whitney, P.E. drove by waving and yelling "Thank You."

It brought tears of joy to Gensler as she waved and said hello while family members tape recorded the event. "Oh, my, this is an amazing surprise," a smiling Gensler said as she held her two-year-old daughter, Lexi.

"She is a superhero," explained Floyd Doring, an 86 years young local realtor, a veteran, and the organizer of the Welcome Home and Appreciation Parade. "She is a nurse who gave up her family to go to New York to help those in need



Above, participants in a motorcade in support of Islander Tara Gensler met at the Bible Presbyterian Family Life Center prior to driving to Sheree Drive. From left: Grand Island Police officer Peter Sukmanowski, Don Harris, Betty Harris, Floyd Doring, Chie Doring, Mary Ehde and Gene Runions. At right, Gensler is pictured at right, center, with her family.

for over a month."

Gensler and three others from the 914th accepted the call in April to support the Department of Defense's effort to combat COVID-19

in New York City, the epicenter of the pandemic in America. She began caring for coronavirus infected patients in the makeshift hospital in the Javits Center before going to Elmhurst Hospital in Queens for daily 7 p.m.-7 a.m. shifts.

"We all had a part to play, and I was just happy to do mine in helping those we served," the soft spoken, humble captain explained. Thoughts of getting home to her family helped get her through the tough, challenging times and she was able to FaceTime with them during the day.

"It was such a great experience working with other branches of the service helping these patients. I work with an amazing group of people at the 914th ASTS and throughout the Air Force Reserve," she said.

Hospitals in New York were tasked to manage increased patient populations with the virus despite staff shortages due to illnesses. According to an article on the Air Force Reserve website, the airmen and airwomen had to own entire wards of patients, and despite the efforts of the AEG medics, many patients they cared for were not able to recover from the coronavirus.

"The stress put on these airmen



and women day in and day out is unbelievable. Many of them were at the patients' bedside when they passed. Some of them even volunteered to video conference with families so they could say goodbye. We may not have won every battle but New York City is in a better place because of their efforts," said Lt. Col. Curt Haase from Joint


Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, which helped bring the Air Force Reservists into the fight against the pandemic.

"When we had arrived, the worst had passed and were turning the corner as far as deaths," Gensler explained. "The hardest part for me was having to watch patients not able to visit with their families. I had one COVID patient who had been on a ventilator for over a month and completely unaware of what had happened when he was finally extubated. He would repeatedly ask for his wife.

"I also took care of a younger woman on a med-surg floor at Elmhurst Hospital who had two boys around the same age as mine," Gensler added. "She was diagnosed with terminal cancer while I was there, and my heart completely broke for her not to be able to be with her boys at all during that time. I could not imagine how she felt."

She continued, "I feel so honored by the constant accolades from friends, family and the community, but truly it is the health care workers in New York City and the first wave of deployers that saw the worst of it who deserve the credit."

Gensler works for Great Lakes Anesthesiology at Oishei Children's Hospital in her civilian job.



Vote

Grand Island Schools 2020-2021 Budget/Trustee Vote

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Absentee ballots ONLY

*All registered voters will receive
a ballot in the mail.*

**Submit ballots to District Clerk
by June 9 at 5pm**

Find Out More

Copies of the district's proposed budget will be available online, the Grand Island Public Library and in the District Office as of May 12, 2020

Please contact the district with questions about the budget development process. Visit the district website at www.grandislandschools.org for more information.

Voter Registration Information

Poll books will be used during this vote/election. If you have not registered for the primary or general election, please view resources on the district website, www.grandislandschools.org under 2020-2021 Budget Information page.

The Grand Island Board of Education supports this budget and encourages residents to call with questions or attend the regularly scheduled meetings. For further information call 773-8805 or visit www.grandislandschools.org



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