

## Valentines for Veterans program draws smiles from local vets

By [Christine O'Connor](#) / February 14, 2014 / [1 Comment](#)



Photos by Rich Dionne

WWII Army veteran George E. Kingston reacts to a Valentine's Day card sent in by school children during a program called Valentine's for Vets at the Bristol Veteran's Home on Monday. The cards were made by school children within the 1st Congressional District, including Bristol Warren students.

"I had gone to her birthday party when I was 19 years old."

Ernie St. Jean's eyes searched his memory. At 91, he had decades of heart-warming recollections to call upon. The most vivid, however, was about the day he met his wife, Gloria — his one and only Valentine.

"We had never seen each other before, and we hit it off pretty well," said the World War II Navy veteran. "I knew it then that we'd get married."

The two were married for over 50 years when she died 10 years ago. At his children's urging, he moved into the R.I. Veterans Home.

"She was a lot of fun, and worked very hard," he said. "She kept a sparkling home, beautiful."

Gloria came to his mind as U.S. Congressman David Cicilline (D-RI) passed out thousands of Valentine's Day cards on Monday, to veterans living at the home. The gesture was made possible by the "Valentines for Veterans" project, which launched in 1996 and coincides with National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans week (Feb. 9 – 14, 2014). The cards were made by school children within the 1st Congressional District, including Bristol Warren students. This is the third year Rep. Cicilline has organized the "Valentines for Veterans."



Veterans Mario Dellarosa (left) and James Peters check out Valentine's Day cards delivered by U.S. Congressman David Cicilline (right).

"Thank you for serving, and stay safe," wrote one student on a folded, bright-red construction paper card.

"You are my hero. Hope you come back to your family," wrote another, on a lace doily glued to a pink heart.

"We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our veterans who have served with honor and sacrificed so much to protect our country," said Rep. Cicilline. "This is one small way to say thank you and I am pleased so many student volunteers showed their support for our veterans and participated in this year's 'Valentines for Veterans.'"

The veterans poured over the cards, smiling at the innocent words.

"This is very beautiful, and nice," said Louis Wagner, 91, also a World War II Navy veteran.