

# EDUCATION

## 2020 Teacher of the Year: Rebecca DiBrienza



Since 2018, the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation has recognized one teacher from the State of New Jersey who has made valuable contributions to the study and teaching of the Vietnam War Era. The Foundation seeks to celebrate and show appreciation to our long-time network of educators that has made teaching this complex history a priority.

Rebecca DiBrienza was selected by the Teacher of the Year Committee, consisting of staff, board members, and volunteers, for her work teaching the era and for her multiple collaborations with the Foundation. "As a lifelong learner and self-professed history nerd, I'm thankful that organizations like the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation exist to keep my passion for history alive and consistently provide fresh new ideas to think about," Rebecca said when she was informed she would be the honoree this year.

Rebecca has been an educator for 10 years and an avid music fan for 32 years. She has been able to incorporate her love of music into her Social Studies classroom at Scotch Plains Fanwood High School. Rebecca has developed a unique approach to teaching U.S. History through song, by which students in her classes learn about fundamental genres of American music, what they sound like, what inspired them, and how technology has helped music evolve. Each unit is accompanied by a playlist and a "song of the week" as a valuable primary source that relates to the content and helps convey to the students the context of a given time period. She has found that this stimulates discussion, sharpens analytical thinking skills, increases student engagement, and creates a love for the social studies.

Her 100-plus students tour the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial annually as a planned school field trip. Rebecca's favorite thing about the trip is the personal touch that every Veteran Tour Guide provides. Their time and attention allow students to ask questions freely, build empathy for the challenges American servicemen experienced, and gain ideas for the oral history project they conduct at the end of the year. This aligns with why Rebecca believes this era is important. In her own words "it allows students to put human faces and individual stories and experiences into the context of a larger global conflict".

## Annual Scholarships

The New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation awards two \$2,500 scholarships for post-high school education (college, university or trade school) each year. This year's winning scholarships were awarded to Abigail Lim of Bernardsville High School who will be attending the University of Virginia, and Julia Zulin of Toms River High School East who will be attending Marist College. This year's scholarship recipients read their winning essays for our virtual Memorial Day Ceremony.



**ABIGAIL LIM**  
BERNARDSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL



**JULIA ZULIN**  
TOMS RIVER HIGH SCHOOL EAST