Mahwah residents among Berrie awardees

Thursday, May 17, 2012

MAHWAH – For her work with Latino residents as executive director of Centro en Union para El Salvador (CEUS) in Union City, Blanca Molina of North Bergen was awarded the $50,000 prize during the Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference ceremonies May 9 at Ramapo College of New Jersey.

Over 19 years, CEUS has facilitated the English education and Spanish literacy of more than 2,000 students and guided more than 2,000 residents in finding affordable immigration legal services. The organization also has sponsored numerous Latino cultural events, youth and adult leadership development workshops and a women’s empowerment group. In addition, Molina organized fundraising drives to help survivors of natural disasters in El Salvador.

Taking home the $35,000 award was Zachary Certner, 15, of Morristown, who is co-founder of Special Needs Awareness and Athletic Programs (SNAP) which provide social and recreational programs to more than 150 children with little or no access to peer-related activities.

Comedian Ron Snipes of Perth Amboy received the $25,000 award using his profession to raise money for those who can’t afford help for emotional issues.

Established in 1997 by the late Russell Berrie and administered by Ramapo College of New Jersey, the Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference honors Garden State residents for their unselfish dedication to serving others within the state. The three winners were among 11 finalists selected by a committee composed of top New Jersey business leaders and professionals.

The other eight finalists received cash awards of $5,000. They included:

* Eric Fuchs-Stengel of Mahwah, executive director of the Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization, Inc., which recruits s
* Jessica Gotthold of Mahwah, founder of the National Foundation for Animal Rescue no-kill animal rescue organization.

* Barry Hackett of West Atlantic City, founder of the South Jersey Field of Dreams in Absecon providing physically- and mentally-disabled children and adults a place to play baseball.

* Kevin Hoagland of New Brunswick, who suffered a spinal cord injury as a college student and founded the Central Jersey Spinal Cord Association to bring about awareness about spinal cord injuries, to provide financial support to research organizations, and to provide financial assistance to people who have suffered spinal cord injuries so that they may purchase adaptive equipment and modify their homes and cars.

* JoAnn McCullough of Montclair, who founded the Improving Montclair Achievement Network Initiative (IMANI) and College Advocacy Center to help address the minority achievement gap in Montclair at the high school.

* Malcolm Sutherland-Foggio, 13, of Florham Park, who founded Make Some Noise: Cure Kids Cancer Foundation to raise awareness about and research funding for pediatric cancers.

* Clark and Jean Paradise of Toms River, who founded Your Grandmother’s Cupboard to serve the homeless in a local tent city.

* Janet Farrand of Long Valley, who is founder of the Fostering Wishes for Children program, part of Foster and Adoptive Family Services, which has granted more than 1,200 wishes for foster children.