

The Russ Berrie Award for **MAKING A
DIFFERENCE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**UNSUNG HEROES DISTINGUISHED AS FINALISTS
FOR RUSS BERRIE AWARD FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

19 New Jersey Residents to be Honored for Giving Back to Their Communities

MAHWAH, N.J., May 24, 2005 – Among the 19 finalists considered for the 2005 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference are a warehouse worker who ignored flames and smoke to pull three passengers from a crashed jet, off duty nurses who saved critically injured accident victims, a suburban wife who galvanized her church to help an inner city school and a boxing champ who overcame prison and illiteracy and now serves as a positive role model to youth.

These New Jerseyans will be honored during ceremonies at Ramapo College of New Jersey in Mahwah on June 2. The top three finalists, chosen by a selection committee comprising eminent New Jersey business leaders and professionals, will receive cash awards of \$50,000, \$35,000 and \$25,000. Other finalists will receive grants of \$2,500.

Delivering the keynote address will be Emmy and AP award winning broadcast journalist Lori Stokes, news anchor for WABC TV's *Eyewitness News This Morning* and *Eyewitness News at Noon*.

This year's finalists include:

Arthur Ackerman of Port Norris is father of four children, adopted as babies by him and his wife. Each of the children, who now range in age from 22 to 35, has Down's Syndrome. Though his wife and oldest daughter have died, Ackerman remains devoted to his family. "What the family lacks in money, and in many other things for that matter, they make up for in love and happiness," said an admirer.

John Bertollo of Hawthorne says his goal in life "has always been to help my neighbors through community involvement." Bertollo is a borough councilman who has committed his time to many community organizations. While Rotary Club president, he secured a \$25,000 grant to construct a playground on which children with and without physical challenges can play. Bertollo, along with his son and brother, put personal risk aside to rescue a neighbor with Multiple Sclerosis whose house was engulfed in flames.

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BERRIE AWARD FINALISTS Add 2-2-2-2

David Butler, MD of Norwood has practiced obstetrics and gynecology at Holy Name Hospital for the past 33 years. For the past 13 years, he has been making annual visits to Haiti's Hôpital Sacré Coeur to provide obstetrical and gynecologic surgery services to poor and underserved women who travel as far as 20 miles for care. Each day, Butler performs five to eight surgeries and sees between 70 and 100 patients.

Attorney **Gary Carbonello of Mendham** donated a kidney to a woman he never met, a 34-year-old mother of three young children whose family was either unable or incompatible to be a donor match. Since that time, Carbonello has served on the Board of Trustees of Transplant Speakers International and on its Advisory Council. He speaks to groups across the country urging them to become organ donors.

Wayne Cesa of Hawthorne is the executive director of Free Throws for AIDS, an organization that he founded in 1998 to improve the quality of life of those whose lives are affected by the virus and to raise awareness of AIDS through education. Thomas Rege, Cesa's cousin, died of complications from AIDS in 1992. In honor of his cousin, Cesa spends every spare moment, and much of his own money, publicizing his cause, trying to help others, especially students in the Paterson area, understand the devastating impact of AIDS and how it can be prevented.

Jerome Colwell of Bayonne has a saying, "There is just one race, that is the human race." And for the past 35 years, he has been helping a variety of people in a variety of circumstances while instilling self-esteem in those he helps. In addition to his work with organizations including Covenant House, American Red Cross, Project Ready, Harmony House, Boy Scouts, Big Brother, he is also a member of the Disaster Action Team and responds to fires and other disasters in the Bergen-Hudson County area.

Kathleen DiChiara is founder and leader of the **Hillside**-based Community FoodBank of New Jersey, one of the largest food banks in the country. Nearly 30 years ago, she was inspired by a Sunday sermon and started collecting food for the needy in the back of her station wagon. Today, a staff of 97, more than 30,000 volunteers, two warehouses and a small fleet of trucks make possible the distribution of more than 23 million pounds of food and groceries annually to more than 1,500 charities serving over 500,000 people in need. She says that as an economic theory, "trickle down" never worked, but "ripple out" does.

Claudio Gomez of West New York was thrust into the role of lifesaver this past February when a charter jet crashed into the Strawberry clothing warehouse in Teterboro, where Gomez is employed. Before firefighters arrived, he defied the thick black smoke and flames that engulfed the jet to pull three survivors from the wreckage.

Janet Hansraj of Mahwah, a registered nurse at Pascack Valley Hospital, was returning from a yoga and mediation retreat when she risked her life to extricate a badly burned and bleeding 20-year-old man from a car that hit a guardrail, flipped over several times, slid down an embankment and landed upside down in a ditch. Hansraj, garbed in a sari, took charge until ambulances arrived, attending to the young man's injuries, and directing passersby to keep other injured passengers from wandering into traffic. It was Hansraj's sari that helped identify her weeks after the accident when authorities sought the identity of the calm, but anonymous rescuer.

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BERRIE AWARD FINALISTS Add 3-3-3-3

Lillie Hendry of Freehold's contributions to her community are underscored by the three nominations she received for the Russ Berrie Award. For the past 10 years, the mentor, activist and community leader has been the president of the Board of Trustees of the Court Street School Education Community Center. Now a Historic Community Center, it was one of the last segregated schools in Monmouth County. Hendry helped refurbish the school and turn it into a community center that operates on public donations and is staffed by volunteers who offer numerous programs for the area's young people.

George Khalid Jones of Prospect Park uses his celebrity as the reigning light heavyweight IBF North American Boxing Federation Champion to break the ice during self-help group sessions he leads at Harbor House in Hudson County. Born and raised in Paterson, Jones was formerly homeless, a drug dealing addict and an ex-convict. He learned to read and write in prison at age 23 and earned his high school diploma during his incarceration. After prison, Jones earned a commercial driving license and began a career in boxing. For the past four years, he has volunteered his time to share his life experiences with young people in schools, churches, community centers and correctional and drug treatment facilities and stress the importance of education, respect for teachers and staying way from gangs, drugs and negative behavior.

Stacey Kindt of Lakewood is the co-founder and director of Redeem-Her, an ex-offender directed, self-help, social services organization. This organization is made up of successful female ex-offenders who reach back to their sisters still behind bars to prepare the incarcerated woman for reconciliation with God, herself, her family and her community. Through their program, One Woman At A Time, Redeem-Her provides a one-on-one, intensive reentry program for women leaving prison. Another program, Your Closet, provides clothing and toiletry items for women leaving prison and entering the work world. Redeem-Her also has an entrepreneurial incubator, Simple But Classy Websites, that provides website design and maintenance to the community while providing training in small business management, basic computer and Internet skills, and website design skills to recently released women.

Sr. Rosemary A. McSorley, Esq. of Pompton Plains is the founder and director of Cornelian Community Counselors, a non-sectarian, not-for-profit law firm that represents battered women, their children, seniors seeking benefits they're entitled to, immigrants seeking citizenship and low-income families in need of legal representation. After teaching school for 25 years, McSorley entered Seton Hall Law School in her sixties and established the firm in 1995 when she passed the bar exam. She relies on donations and grants to cover the firm's expenses. She continues to work tirelessly to ensure her clients receive the appropriate services and to help them become more productive citizens through job placement, finding an apartment or job training.

Evelyn Personeus of River Vale is a registered nurse at Bergen Regional Medical Center. This past January, a car crashed into trees, a telephone pole and a cement structure that held a mailbox outside her home. After she called 911, she found the car's passenger, a 20-year-old man, unconscious and pinned in the wreck. Personeus determined he was near death but she climbed into the car through the window to hold his head so he could breathe, or, if the worst happened, be with him if his heart stopped beating. Police officers were able to use a crowbar to free the passenger's legs and drag him out. The young man recovered from his injuries.

BERRIE AWARD FINALISTS 4-4-4

Losing all four limbs as a result of an infection 12 years ago did not stop **Michael V. Sciullo of Brigantine** from returning to his photography business in Atlantic City. After months of intensive care and additional physical and occupational therapy he walked out of Bacharach Re-Hab in Pomona, NJ, with four artificial limbs. As a member of a support group for amputees at Bacharach, he so impressed the patients that the doctor there suggested Sciullo take over the group. He continues as a volunteer counselor and serves as chairman of the Atlantic County Disabled Citizens Advisory Board and chairman of the Atlantic County Veterans Advisory Board. He was influential in the construction of a new Veterans Medical Center that serves the needs of veterans in Atlantic County.

Seven years ago, **Lipica Jaclyn Shah of Clarksburg** and several Girl Scout friends started a disaster supply center to assist several families in Millstone who lost their homes and possessions to fire. They collected basic items families would need to carry on with daily life, from clothes and household supplies to personal products. After the troop disbanded, Shah continued the effort and created Project HOPE (Helping Our People Everyday), obtaining township approval and involvement. She obtained and restored a trailer and held various drives to collect items needed to fill it, while involving younger scouts to teach them about leadership and community service. When Shah leaves for college, the fully stocked trailer will be run by the township's Emergency Management Office. Now 17, Shah is on the National By Girls, for Girls Advisory Committee, represents the Monmouth Council of Girl Scouts to the Board of Directors, is a member of the Girl Scouts Teen Speakers Bureau and is Red Cross certified in life guarding, small craft safety, CPR and First Aid.

Since **Lindsey Tippett of Hamilton** learned three years ago that she has Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare form of malignant bone tumor, she has made it a lifelong mission to help others suffering from cancer. She has raised over \$60,000 for the oncology department at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia through bake sales, sponsored walks and conducting community blood drives, even while traveling to Philadelphia for bi-weekly chemotherapy treatments. During a year of treatment, Lindsey spent more than 100 days in the hospital, yet managed to remain on her school's honor roll by being tutored at home. She has served as an inspiration to her classmates; telecommunications students made a documentary film in her honor.

Kathleen Toth of Wyckoff is an advocate of family values and community involvement. About 10 years ago, she organized a group of volunteers to serve the poor in the school of Sacred Heart in Jersey City, visiting the school twice a week to assist the teachers who work in an area with high unemployment and many people living at or below the poverty level. Toth recognized the neighborhood's need for an organized and sustained support mechanism to help students succeed and the school to remain viable. She helped create the Angel Fund at her own parish in Wyckoff, the Church of St. Elizabeth, which raises over \$100,000 each year to assist Jersey City families who otherwise would not be able to afford to send their children to Sacred Heart. Since the involvement of Toth and her volunteers, over 400 students have graduated from Sacred Heart and the school has a waiting list.

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BERRIE AWARD FINALISTS 5-5-5-5

Joann Tyler of Mine Hill began feeding the homeless on Thanksgiving 2003 by taking a few plates of food to six homeless people sitting in a park in Dover. A year later, she was feeding breakfast and dinner to more than 50 people a day. When the town told her she could continue only if she prepared the food in a licensed kitchen, she received permission to use facilities at the Head Start Community Program of Morris County. Tyler and a colleague, Vanetta Davis, recently founded a nonprofit organization, Missionaries of God, and provide breakfast, dinner and clothing. Tyler has also taken on a new mission: establishing a homeless shelter in Dover. And yet, it isn't this endeavor alone that earned her a nomination. Tyler has three birth children, seven adopted children and more than 20 foster children, many of whom have special needs.

Late philanthropist and businessman Russ Berrie created the award in 1997 to honor the efforts of those who give back to the community, without thought of recognition or reward, and inspire others to action.

Russ Berrie founded Russ Berrie and Company, Inc. in 1963. While best known for its teddy bears and other plush animals, the Company's gift and juvenile lines comprise a diverse range of everyday, seasonal, and occasion-themed products that help people celebrate the milestones in their lives. Headquartered in New Jersey, today the Company operates offices, showrooms, and distribution centers all over the world and trades on the NYSE under the symbol RUS.

In addition to his business accomplishments, Mr. Berrie devoted boundless energy and resources to numerous charitable causes, earning recognition in 1998 as one of the 40 most generous Americans by *Fortune* Magazine. His widow, Angelica Berrie, shared his passion for giving and now leads the Russell Berrie Foundation's efforts to realize his philanthropic vision.

Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's public liberal arts college, serving 5,600 undergraduate and graduate students from more than 20 states and 60 nations. The College named its center for performing and visual arts, the site of the Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference ceremony, in honor of both Mr. Berrie and his wife Angelica.

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