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**NEW JERSEY'S UNSUNG HEROES DISTINGUISHED AS FINALISTS
FOR RUSS BERRIE AWARD FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

19 State Residents to be Honored for Giving Back to Their Communities

MAHWAH, N.J., May 7, 2007 – For their unselfish dedication to serving others, 19 Garden State residents will be honored during ceremonies to present the 2007 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference on May 18 at Ramapo College of New Jersey.

Among the finalists are a high schooler who has been working to end child hunger, a World War II veteran who turned basketball games with his wounded brother into a worldwide movement to promote competition among wheelchair athletes and two mothers whose personal tragedies inspired them to work on behalf of others.

These New Jerseyans will be honored during ceremonies at Ramapo College of New Jersey in Mahwah on May 18. 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 Saranne Rothberg, founder of the Comedy Cures Foundation and a previous award recipient.

This year's finalists include:

John J. Babitz, Jr. of **Wayne**, Fire Commissioner for Wayne with 40 years of service to Preakness Volunteer Fire Company. Currently serving as chaplain for his department and the Passaic County Fireman's Association, Babitz earned numerous citations for rushing into a burning home to rescue two neighbors from a fire that claimed the lives of two other family members.

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For more than 20 years, **George Brewer** of **Wayne** and his wife have opened their home to seriously ill children who have come to the U.S. for medical treatment. As host parents for Healing the Children, they have cared for dozens of children, from infants to teens for period ranging from weeks to months. George Brewer also has also made eight trips to the Dominican Republic as trip administrator for the group's International Medical Trips Program.

Derrick Brown of **Orange** protects his community from fires as a member of the fire department, but has gone beyond those duties to serve the community. A driving force behind the department's annual holiday food and gift drives, the former body builder obtained a grant to establish a wellness program to help his brother firefighters deal with the stresses of firefighting in an urban setting, and is working to establish a junior fire academy to instill a desire for service among the city's youth.

Within a two-day period last December, **Jamie Lauren Cohen** of **Livingston** saved two children from drowning. The University of Michigan pre-med student was on holiday break in Florida when she resuscitated a four-year-old girl who had no pulse and had stopped breathing just two days after she pulled a toddler from a pool where she had been floating, motionless and face down. For the past eight years, she has also continued to grow the Roseville Project, which she conceived as a program to provide holiday cheer to underserved children in Newark.

The daughter of **Rosemarie L. D'Alessandro** of **Hillsdale** never returned home after leaving on a spring day in 1973 to deliver Girl Scout cookies. The body of seven-year-old Joan, who had been raped and murdered, was found in a park in upstate New York. Although the killer was convicted and sentenced, New Jersey's law allowed the possibility of parole. Because of Florence D'Alessandro's efforts, there are now state and federal laws to ensure criminals who murder during the commission of a sex crime are kept behind bars and that victims' families do not face time limits to bring civil suits against the offenders.

Daniel Ryan Feldman of **Linwood** is founder of "Kids Feeding Kids" and a co-founder, with his sisters, of Peer Partners. Last year, he reached his goal of raising \$20,000 to feed the hungry, using his talent and passion for baking to run a series of successful bake sales. The Mainland Area Regional High School student has also collected toiletries for the homeless and books for children who lost theirs in Hurricane Katrina, and helped run a fundraiser to build a specially designed baseball field for children and adults with disabilities.

Donyea Hoffman Goodwin of **Newark** was determined to "do something" to help two young, homeless drug addicted mothers who wandered into her workplace. She began looking for a home to open as a shelter. When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, the shelter became the temporary home for two displaced extended families – a total of more than 50 people – for whom she found permanent homes within 30 days of their arrival in New Jersey. To continue to help disaster victims, she established Each One Help One, a gift registry to match donors with those in need.

James J. Hill of **Haledon** has worked on behalf of children in foster care for more than 22 years as a member of the Child Placement Review Board. With his late wife Rosemarie, he raised three children and more than 30 foster children. Since establishing a scholarship fund in her name, more than \$20,000 in grants have been awarded to graduating seniors in foster and adoptive homes, and another \$8,000 in opportunity grants have been awarded by the Paul Hinton Scholarship Fund he established in memory of a lifelong friend. For 30 years, Hill has been a member of the Juvenile Conference Committee, hearing first offender cases to relieve the courts of some of their case overload.

Dana Katzman-Spett of **Mahwah** combined her love of horses with her experience in social work to found Pony Power Therapies. From its beginnings in 2000 with one horse and four riders, the organization has grown and now has a permanent home at Three Sisters Farm in Mahwah. Each week, Pony Power serves more than 200 clients living with disorders including autism, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and depression, providing a safe and nurturing environment to help riders gain flexibility, balance, muscle strength, confidence and self-esteem.

Patricia Kettenring of **Summit** has helped more than 1,900 aspiring artists learn the art of lampworking – glass bead and tile making – and become self-sufficient through the arts since establishing GlassRoots in Newark in 2000. Conceived as a way to keep bright, at-risk students interested in school, the program also provides business and marketing skills to give young entrepreneurs volunteer experience they can take with them into the corporate world.

Jack Kuepfer of **Clifton** is 86 years old, but still puts in several hours a day to care for the Morris Canal Park and Wildlife Preserve on Broad Street. A master gardener, his vision and initiative reclaimed this section of land along the historic canal from weeds and litter and transformed it into a habitat for wildlife, birds, fish and hives of bees that pollinate the park's gardens and trees.

When a stroke paralyzed **Diane D'Apolito May** of **Pequannock**, a network of close friends helped the mother of four boys – including a month-old baby – with medical and legal expenses. Realizing that there were other people in similar circumstances without that support, May established Beyond the Rainbow to help others facing medical, economic and personal challenges and has so far distributed more than \$250,000 to 13 families in need.

Tim McLoone of **Little Silver** hits the road every holiday season, performing with Holiday Express in an average of 50 concerts between Thanksgiving and Christmas. In addition to music, this grassroots volunteer organization provides meals and gifts at venues throughout New Jersey and New York. The group also sponsors scholarships and has helped renovate soup kitchens that serve those in need. McLoone also took his New Jersey brand of friendship to Colorado following the shootings at Columbine High School and to the Gulf Region in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

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At age 75, **Dr. Milton “Mickey” Mintz** of **Denville** came out of retirement four years ago to open his “Doc in a Car” medical practice to help chronically ill patients. In addition to improving the quality of life for his elderly patients – most are over 86 years of age and have difficulty getting to the doctor’s office – Dr. Mintz helps them avoid the burdensome cost of nursing home care, sometimes waiving co-payments and helping pay for prescriptions from his own pocket.

Donald Roden of **Hillsborough** spearheaded an effort to save young offenders escape a cycle of crime and incarceration by helping them obtain an education. Building upon an existing program at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility, Roden helped create a pilot partnership between the facility and Rutgers University, where he is an associate professor of history. By helping with applications for admission and financial aid, Roden is paving the way for the successful re-entry into society. To date, there are five former Mountainview residents enrolled at Rutgers University College; two have maintained B-averages and one received straight A’s last fall. Eight more have applied for admission in the fall of 2007.

Teacher **Debby Rooney** of **Ventnor** fell in love with Kenya on her first visit to that country in 1991. She established and now leads BEADS for Education, an organization founded to market the beautiful beadwork of the Maasai women and use the proceeds to educate their daughters. In a country where education is costly and where girls are typically forced to marry shortly after puberty rites that include female circumcision, Rooney has nurtured the seeds of change by helping plan the first ceremony without the ancient practice. Among the Maasai people she is known as “Mother of Many Girls.”

Pediatrician **Mark J. Wade** of **Saddle River** borrowed \$25,000 from his children’s college fund to use as seed money for Arise and Walk Ministries, which provides medical resources and healthcare for the poor in Third World countries. Relying on their own efforts and the generosity of friends and colleagues, Arise and Walk and its clinical arm, Doctors with Wings, have given close to \$100,000 in cash grants and millions in medication, supplies and skilled personnel service to missions in Kenya, Jamaica, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Thailand and Indonesia.

Al Youakim of **Hillsdale** is recognized as a founding father of wheelchair basketball who helped write the rules of the game and expand the opportunities for wheelchair-bound athletes to other sports, including track and field. Now 80 years old and retired from the U.S. Postal Service, he is still actively involved running drills and teaching the sport at Hackensack Middle School.

Sarah Zogar of **North Bergen** fled civil war in her native Liberia, carrying her infant daughter, to seek a better life in the U.S. She settled in Hudson County, became an American citizen and raised three daughters while supporting her mother and niece, also rescued from the fighting. When two decades of civil strife finally ended, Zogar kept a promise to give the children of her village a brighter future. Contributing \$18,000 of her own money, she established the Zogar Foundation and began raising funds needed to build a school. Ground was broken last spring, but her efforts continue to obtain needed funding for teacher salaries, books, uniforms and a generator for the school.

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