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**Berrie Foundation Pays Tribute to New Jersey's Unsung
Heroes for Acts of Community Service**

***Recipients of 2014 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference
Honored at Ramapo College Ceremony***

(MAHWAH, NJ) – Unsung heroes from throughout New Jersey earned recognition for their compassion and concern for others as part of the 18th Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference ceremony at Ramapo College on April 30.

“The award recognizes the power of making a difference,” said Angelica Berrie, president of the Russell Berrie Foundation. “Every nominee embodies a sense of purpose that spurs them to action.”

The top honoree received a cash prize of \$50,000; the second place honoree received \$35,000 and the third place honoree received \$25,000. Eight awards with a \$5,000 cash prize each were also announced. Established in 1997 by the late Russell Berrie and managed and hosted by Ramapo College of New Jersey, the Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference honors Garden State residents who answered the call to assist those in need.

Alfa Demmellash, co-founder and chief executive officer of Rising Tide Capital, an organization that transforms lives and communities through entrepreneurship served as the keynote speaker. Demmellash established Rising Tide Capital to support underserved entrepreneurs in low-income urban communities of northern New Jersey.

About the 2014 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference Honorees

- For her work providing primary medical services to the underserved in Freehold, **Joyce Jenkins** of **Marlboro** was awarded a \$50,000 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference. Jenkins is the founder and director of the Paul M. McGuire Family Health Center in **Freehold**. A nurse practitioner, she had been a volunteer at a free clinic in Neptune. When the clinic moved to a larger facility, Jenkins saw an opportunity to bring free medical services to the Freehold area. She convinced the clinic to donate the trailer they had been using to provide medical services to Jenkins’ church, New Beginnings Agape Christian Center. She recruited a medical director and medical professionals. She secured funding and private donations to start the McGuire Family Health Center. The Center opened in 2005 and nearly all who work there are volunteers who provide desperately needed health care services. Jenkins’ dream expanded when the Center moved to a larger facility in 2007. The Center provides physical and primary care

services, immunizations and pediatric, ophthalmology and dermatological services. The Center has served more than 3,000 patients, totaling over 10,000 visits.

- **Edith Coogan** of **Cranford** lists her occupation as homemaker and crusader for homeless families. The founder of Raphael's Life House, a 12-bed program in **Elizabeth** for homeless pregnant women, mothers and children, received the \$35,000 award. Coogan, who is 82 and the mother of seven, established Raphael's Life House 20 years ago. She was frustrated by the lack of services and took matters into her own hands. Through her efforts, hundreds of women and their children receive prenatal care and a new start in life. Coogan is omnipresent in her efforts, securing a \$1 per year lease for the program's facility and galvanizing thousands of donors and volunteers over the years.
- **Joseph Blythe** of **Hasbrouck Heights** accepted the \$25,000 Berrie Award for Making a Difference. Blythe converted his vision for a facility to feed the hungry into a reality when he established Meals with a Mission in 2010. Working with two local churches, Corpus Christi and Assumption Church, he planted the seed. The organization has expanded from cooking meals one night a week in the Corpus Christi school's cafeteria to a full-time facility in **Garfield** that opened last year. His vision, commitment and financial support have made a difference in the lives of thousands. Many joined Blythe and contributed personal time, labor and equipment to feed the hungry. Since opening in Garfield, Meals with a Mission has distributed more than 53,000 meals. Blythe leads a dedicated team of 130 who are committed to making sure no one goes hungry.

Cash awards of \$5,000 were presented to:

- In 2011, **Joseph Abate III** of **North Caldwell** was 16-years-old and working on a boat dock with two friends at his family's vacation home when one alerted him to a loud scream. Abate recognized the voice as that of his neighbor. He immediately sprang into action, jumped over two concrete walls and ran through backyards to reach her. His neighbor was with her fallen father who had collapsed. Abate used the training he received from the Boy Scouts. He checked the man's vital signs and discovering that the man had no pulse and was not breathing, Abate began CPR. He revived the man and comforted him and his neighbor until the paramedics arrived. It was a day that Joseph won't forget for many reasons as it was the fifth anniversary of his grandmother's death. Her spirit was certainly with him on that day.
- Making a house into a home is what **Patricia and Raymond Dansen** of **North Haledon** have done for more than a decade. The couple has provided a safe haven for 29 foster children and respite care for numerous others. Many of those children have special medical needs and life-threatening conditions or injuries. The Dansens cared for a premature infant suffering from drug addiction and a child on an apnea monitor, to cite just a few examples. The family, besides sharing its love for these children, also coordinates medical care and appointments – a daunting and time-consuming task. Don't tell them there aren't enough hours in the day - the Dansens do this while caring for their five children, two of whom are adopted. A representative from Children's Aid and

Family Services said this about the Dansens work and their legacy, “With the love and attention the family has showered upon each, these children have blossomed into healthy, exuberant boys and girls.”

- As a high school student, **Keely Freeman** of **East Orange** first gained experience as a volunteer helping those less fortunate. It was a moment that remained with her throughout the years and prompted her to do even more as an adult to assist the homeless. In 2008, Freeman quit her Wall Street job and used savings to open Sierra House, a 20-person facility that provides housing and life skills training to at-risk youth. Freeman serves as executive director. Since its inception, Sierra House has served more than 150 women and children throughout the state. Freeman’s efforts have produced positive results for many – 31 percent of those who sought services at Sierra House enrolled in college or a postsecondary program, 28 percent entered the workforce and 9 percent earned high school diplomas or GEDs.
- **Lisa Goldman** of **Clifton** and **Rita Yohalem** of **West Orange** are the founders of Opportunity Project Clubhouse Program for adults with brain injuries. Based in **Millburn**, Opportunity Project’s mission helps the brain-injured to realize their potential. The two founders shared a common bond: Goldman’s son had sustained serious brain injury from a brain tumor at 13 and Yohalem’s son sustained brain injuries from an auto crash at 19. After their sons’ lengthy medical and rehabilitation treatment, they soon realized that many challenges remained. They asked what they could do. Goldman created a blueprint of what a program could look like that would meet her son’s needs and explored one called “The Clubhouse Model.” A social worker introduced her to Yohalem and they toured Clubhouse programs throughout the country to start their own. Opportunity Project began with one-day-a-week services in a library in 1994 and moved into donated office space. The women secured grants, raised funds and today the program provides services five-days-a-week. In 2005, Opportunity Project Clubhouse moved into its own building. The program celebrates 20 years of service this July to the brain-injured.
- **Zamir Hassan** of **Bedminster** founded Muslims Against Hunger Project to engage the Muslim community in social action. He decided to do so after 9/11. He visited the Morristown Soup Kitchen with his son’s class and saw how many suffered from poverty and hunger. The program has evolved into Faith Against Hunger, a North American network of volunteers who help the hungry and homeless. The Network provides support services and a pathway to self-sufficiency. In 2011, Hassan started a Hunger Van that brings food and needed items to the homeless in the streets. He has united volunteers across religious, political and socio-economic boundaries while promoting common group and respect. Hassan practices what he believes: “Be good to orphans, the poor and your neighbors.”
- **Tawanda Jones** of **Camden** gives girls their marching orders. With her husband, Robert, Jones runs Camden Sophisticated Sisters, a dance, drum and step drill team that has become an outlet for thousands of children in the city. Started in 1986, Camden Sophisticated Sisters instills discipline and provides a window of opportunity toward a

brighter future. The group practices at the base of Camden's water tower and has gotten noticed, with appearances at local parades and on *Dancing with the Stars* and *Good Morning America*. Jones is hoping to find space for the organization to continue its missions as a safe haven. Since its inception, all 4,000 youngsters who participated in the program have graduated high school in a city in which the graduation rate is less than 50 percent. Jones' accomplishments have not gone unnoticed -- *CNN* honored her with its Hero of the Year Award.

- **William Smith of Fairview** is a reluctant hero. In February of 2012, he acted in a split second without regard for his safety. He pulled an 82-year-old man from a burning car that was about to explode. The student and father of two admits that he simply acted and did what had to be done. For his efforts, Smith has received the Carnegie Medal from the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission.
- **Dr. Brian Ullman, DDS of Ho-Ho-Kus** has been providing dental care at no cost to clients of Eva's Village in **Paterson** for more than 10 years. He has also recruited several other dentists. He started the dental clinic in 2002. In 2004, thanks to a grant from Delta Dental, clients were able to receive complete and partial dentures. Dr. Ullman takes before and after photos of his patients and hangs them in the clinic's hallway so that patients can see the difference a good smile makes. The dental hygienist and prosthodontic assistant from the dentist's private practice also volunteer their time. He has been particularly attuned to the dental issues associated with homeless and addicted adults including poor oral hygiene, increased tooth decay, missing teeth and periodontal disease. With each new smile he provides, Dr. Ullman gives clients health, hope and dignity.

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Ranked by U.S. News & World Report as sixth in the Best Regional Universities North category for public institutions, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes mistaken for a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,008 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers seven graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.