



**RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY**  
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*Contact: Angela Daidone*  
*201-684-7477*  
*adaidon1@ramapo.edu*

## **Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award Celebrates Honorees at 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Ceremony Ramapo College**

MAHWAH, N.J. — Unsung heroes from throughout New Jersey earned recognition for their compassion and concern for others as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award ceremony at Ramapo College on May 6.

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 Making a Difference Award honors Garden State residents whose outstanding community service and charitable contributions made a substantial impact on the lives of others.

### *About the 2016 Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award Honorees*

- In 2009 **Vincent Mann** took the title and responsibilities of the Ringwood-based Turtle Clan Chief of the Ramapough-Lenape Tribe, situated in the Ramapo Mountains. Turtle Clan members live atop and nearby the historic Ringwood mines, the site which remains one of contamination and hazard. Beginning in the 1950s through the 1970s, the Ford Motor Company, then located in Mahwah, systematically dumped toxic materials into the mines and the surrounding region, which was found to be a potential cause of continuing illness and premature death that had plagued the people who lived there. The area was listed as a Superfund project by the EPA, forcing Ford to clean up. By the end of the 1990s, the EPA deemed the project complete but illness and evidence of contamination persisted, spiraling the clan members into much hopelessness. Something needed to be done. Chief Mann, who resides in **West Milford**, rallied his people and, with the help of the newspapers who documented the story, the EPA reopened the Superfund site and forced Ford back to do additional cleanup. He worked with faculty at NYU and Ramapo College, and state and federal health and disease control agencies to study the health effects from waste sites on Ringwood tribal residents. Chief Mann became not only the tireless representative of the Turtle Clan and their ultimate survival but also the passionate advocate for a cleaner, safer environment. Chief Mann also serves as the cultural monitor to ensure that the sacred land of his clan remains preserved as the gas companies seek to expand their fracking efforts from

Pennsylvania to the east. He also is poised to play an important role to protect the integrity of the Ramapough culture as the proposed Pilgrim pipeline is planned to traverse the Ramapo Mountains. For his work on behalf of the Turtle Clan, the Ramapough/Lenape Tribe, all the people in the surrounding area and the environment itself, Chief Vincent Mann is the recipient of the \$50,000 Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award.

- In 1975, **Julia and Joseph Quinlan's** 21-year-old daughter Karen Ann fell into an irreversible coma. The **Newton** couple's heartache did not end there. They faced a legal battle to have the respirator disconnected to allow their daughter "die with dignity." The Quinlan case drew unwanted national and international attention; however, their victory a year later led to societal changes including Living Wills, Advanced Directives and POLST (Practitioner Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) forms which empower an individual to work with a medical team to detail personal goals and medical preferences when faced with a serious illness. In 1976, the Quinlans wrote a book about their journey and donated the proceeds from the sale to the then newly-establish the Karen Ann Quinlan Foundation. Julia spent several years learning about the hospice movement, a fairly new concept at that time and, in 1980, co-founded the Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice, the first of its kind in the area and the first Medicare certified home-based hospice in the state. In 1990, Julia pioneered a local bereavement center for those who struggle with grief. Quinlan Hospice and the Bereavement Center treat patients and counsel grieving loved ones regardless of the ability to pay. Today, at 89 years old, Julia continues to give. Last year, she led the construction of the Karen Ann Quinlan Home for Hospice, a residence for those who cannot receive hospice in their home or whose caregivers need a respite. Julia Quinlan's determination amid tragic loss has led to comfort for so many and she is the recipient of the \$35,000 Russ Berrie making a Difference Award.

- **Faye Zealand of Howell**, the recipient of the \$25,000 Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award, knew very little about AIDS in the mid-1980s. But when a close family friend died of the disease, Faye and her husband Terrence felt compelled to take action. She began volunteering in the AIDS unit at the United Children's Hospital in Newark where pioneering work was being done. Faye learned that many babies and young children who were HIV-positive were confined to hospitals simply because there was nowhere for them to go. Faye and Terrence founded the AIDS Resource Foundation for Children in 1987, the goal of which was to provide children with a nurturing and supportive environment while awaiting return to their own relatives or placement in foster homes. With a \$150,000 grant from the State Department of Health, they established the first transitional home for children with AIDS in the country – St. Clare's in Elizabeth, named for the patron saint of children in distress. Additional homes have since opened in Jersey City and Neptune and have extended their services to abused and neglected medically fragile children. St. Clare's also provides medical case management, referral of health and mental health services, substance abuse treatment, peer support groups, emergency food pantry, and nutrition counseling. Faye's work for 30 years has helped fight the stigma of HIV-AIDS, lessen disparities in education and healthcare for the families they serve, and has been a beacon of hope for children and their families.

- As an American Muslim who grew up in a post 9/11 world, **Ziad Ahmed** faced a society that devalued and feared his faith and culture. But even as he encountered negativity, Ziad, a student at **Princeton Day School**, refused to sit back and do nothing. In 2013, Ziad, only 13 years old at the time, created Redefy.org, an online initiative that serves to fight misconceptions based on stereotyping and ignorance as it affects persons perceived as “different” or “other.” In 2014, Redefy focused on social integration and education for students with special needs or disabilities. In 2015, the focus was on reducing racial prejudice and hatred within individual communities. Ziad’s fearless leadership in moving forward in his activists pursuits have garnered the attention of noted social movements such as #DareToUnderstand, #PrincetonAgainstRacism, #TheGenerationOfNew and the VOICES campaign, an ongoing conversation series for teens to share their opinions on current events. Through the use of technology and social media, the Redefy founder has succeeded in drawing many young people to speak out about their experiences with discrimination. Recently Ziad was invited to the White House to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan as one of President Obama’s invited guests.

- In 1995, schools in Elizabeth were overcrowded and budgets were being slashed. In many of the schools, the arts became the victim. As a longtime educator and having been raised on choir music, **Betty Prezzy Bryant of Hillside** fully understood the importance of arts as a powerful vehicle for learning and life itself. She began a summer arts program that grew to become the Institute of Music for Children. The first class had 15 boys and girls. Twenty years later, Miss Betty (as she is known) has transformed those humble beginnings into a stand-alone non-profit agency that embraces the arts to build community and develop the youth in Elizabeth. In 2015 alone, 650 students spent more than 50,000 hours in classes with the some of the state’s top teaching artists. A remarkable 95 percent of Miss Betty’s graduating seniors went to college, the military or other post-secondary educational institutions. And she’s not done yet. This year, she is leading the first expansion of the Institute to Plainfield, New Jersey. The Institute’s SmART’s residency program is expected to reach more than 400 students in Newark, replacing the city’s arts programs decimated by years of budget cuts. She was named a “Woman of Excellence” by the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

- In September of 2010, **Jane and Joseph Clementi of Ridgewood** suffered a devastating loss when their son Tyler committed suicide after an episode of cyberbullying while a student at Rutgers University. Tyler, a freshman living in the dorms on campus, had been targeted by his roommate because of his sexual orientation. In the months that followed Tyler’s death, Jane and Joseph somehow found the strength to carry on with their lives but also to use their personal tragedy to inspire a better world and way of life for others. They founded the Tyler Clementi Foundation, a non-profit organization that works to end online and offline bullying in schools, workplaces and faith communities. The Clementis have traveled to schools across the state and the nation to share their story and to promote safe, inclusive and respectful environments for vulnerable youth and their allies. They have worked on building a relationship with Rutgers University where the Tyler Clementi Center was created on the New Brunswick campus. The Center focuses on research around the freshman year experience and transition as well as bullying prevention. Jane and Joseph collaborated with the San Francisco gay Men’s Chorus to

create a choral arrangement called Tyler's Suite, a musical piece that shares Tyler's story, and are working with the New York Law School to create The Tyler Clementi Institute for internet Safety.

- Not many people can face their demons head-on, let alone speak publicly about them. **Lisa Gladwell of River Edge** is one of those people whose personal experiences of addiction led her to dramatically change the landscape for those in recovery. After completing treatment at Van Ost Institute for Family Living in Englewood, Lisa took a leadership role in the program's alumni organization. She continued her service by joining the Board of Directors and later co-chaired for many years Friends of Addiction Recovery, a statewide grassroots organization which brought the first Recovery Walks to New Jersey. To better advocate for the vulnerable, Lisa pursued a law degree and is licensed in both New Jersey and New York, providing pro bono legal assistance to people in need. She has brought 12 Step meetings to men and women in therapeutic halfway houses and the Bergen County Jail's drug rehabilitation program, she is president of the Father Jim McKenna Memorial Fund, which provides support to individuals and organizations associated with recover from addiction, and is part of the Newly forming New Jersey Recovery Coalition, a statewide group working to increase dialogue and collaboration among agencies in areas of prevention, treatment and recovery. She also has spearheaded New Jersey Recovery Advocates, a not-for-profit group of volunteers working to bring hope to those afflicted by addiction. With so many lives destroyed by addiction, Lisa's courage has been a ray of hope.

- Six years ago when he was first diagnosed with cancer, **Seth Grumet of Marlboro** realized that many of his fellow patients were struggling with more than the disease: they did not have a support network or the financial means to deal with hardship that cancer brings with it. While undergoing treatment for his own Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Seth established STOMP the Monster, a charitable organization that provides financial and other support to cancer patients, their families and caregivers when they need it most – during their fight with the disease. Since 2010, STOMP has helped more than 2,000 families in the Marlboro area, distributing more than \$1 million in gift cards for groceries and gasoline, bill payments for utilities, rent, child care and phones, and even payment for pharmacy co-pays and insurance. STOMP The Monster volunteers deliver meals and provide assistance for patients who seek social services. Seth has personally taken up the cause – dressing as Santa to deliver presents on Christmas and snow plowing driveways of families who would have no means of affording it themselves. Next month (June), the sixth annual 5K fundraiser run through Marlboro has already attracted 2,800 runners – a big jump from the 200 runners in its first year.

- Some people see a problem and turn and walk away. Then there are others who take action to make the world better for others. **Adam Lowy of Asbury Park** is one of those people. He grew up working for his family's moving company and witnessed first-hand how much waste there was when people moved: furniture, clothing and especially food. He began encouraging clients to donate their unwanted food rather than throw it away and he made sure the moving company brought it to the local

food bank. In that first month, he collected more than 300 pounds of food. He thought, if one moving company can do that, imagine the impact an entire network of moving companies can have. He founded Move for Hunger in 2009 and single-handedly changed the business model for more than 650 moving companies who joined this initiative. To date, Move for Hunger has delivered more than six million pounds of food to food banks and pantries across the United States and Canada. And the movement now has grown to include realtors, corporate housing providers and other components of the relocation industry.

- In 1992, **Connie Mercer** started a grass roots operation in her **Lawrenceville** kitchen to work toward ending homelessness in Central New Jersey by soliciting resources and expertise from community organizations. That wasn't enough. Working tirelessly over the past 24 years and with the help of a team of volunteers, she raised funds to move the operation to a 42,000 square foot facility in Ewing, New Jersey. HomeFront is now a family campus, housing an emergency shelter with space for 38 families, a job readiness program, teaching kitchen, childcare center and an art therapy center, all supported by onsite local agency services. Since its official opening in 2015 and thanks to Connie's leadership, HomeFront has afforded emergency shelter to 301 families, including 382 children, 230 jobless clients became employed, 736 families have been able to remain in their homes through Homefront's homelessness prevention program, and 551 children benefited from year-round programming.

- One day this past January, six-year Aryan Gavali was walking to school with his mother when the unthinkable happened. Out of nowhere, a raccoon leapt onto the little boy, biting his face and attacking his eyes. **Danny Walls of Elmwood Park** was nearby getting out of his truck and heard the mother's screams. At first he couldn't see what was happening, but as he approached the scene he witnessed the savage attack by the 20-pound raccoon. Thinking quickly, he grabbed a fiberglass pole from his truck and beat off the animal, killing the raccoon and saving the boy's life. Danny put himself in harm's way – the raccoon was later determined to have rabies – but didn't hesitate to come to the rescue. After the boy was taken to the hospital, Danny got back in his truck and cried, thinking of his own small children. His quick thinking and compassion truly epitomizes the definition of Good Samaritan.