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INFORMATION EMBARGOED UNTIL NOON, JUNE 1

**BERRIE FOUNDATION PAYS TRIBUTE
TO NEW JERSEY'S UNSUNG HEROES
FOR ACTS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE**

*Recipients of 2010 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference
Honored at Ramapo College Ceremony*

(MAHWAH, NJ) – After seeing a plea from the Flemington Food Pantry asking gardeners to bring excess produce to the pantry to feed those in need, **Chip Paillex** of **Pittstown** started Grow-a-Row, an organization based in Hunterdon County that grows fresh produce to feed the hungry. For his efforts, Paillex was awarded a \$50,000 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference. Started in 2002 with the help of Chip's then 4-year-old daughter, the first season netted 120 pounds of food that was given to the pantry. Last year, Grow-a-Row donated 317,000 pounds of produce throughout New Jersey with the help of more than 900 volunteers, many from Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, whose members gave more than 5,000 hours of help.

Taking home the \$35,000 award was **Natasha Rodgers** of **Somerset**. She created a non-profit organization to honor her grandfather. The Simuel Whitfield Simmons Organization continues the legacy of a minister who believed that it takes a village to strengthen a family. During the past 10 years, without collecting a salary, she has conducted clothing, food and furniture drives and created a youth mentorship program. Her approach has been to help less fortunate members of the community know that every dream can be realized through hard work and determination.

Joan Schaefer of **Bergenfield** received the \$25,000 award. In 1959, she realized there was a need for a girls' sports league. Determined, she contacted 20 towns to assess an interest. Six responded and the United Girls Athletic League Suburbia, UGALS, was born. UGALS began as a basketball and softball program for girls ages 10 through 17. Softball became the focus in 1978. Schaefer has overseen the league's growth and there are now 82 town-based teams from 37 towns in Bergen, Passaic and Hudson counties. As UGALS' only president, Schaefer, a spry 95-year-old, is a visible presence at all UGALS activities, including games.

In all, 11 finalists were selected by a committee comprised of eminent New Jersey business leaders and professionals. 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.

Angelica Berrie, president of the Russell Berrie Foundation told those in attendance, "The award recognizes the power of making a difference. Every nominee embodies a sense of purpose that spurs them to action."

The keynote speaker was Governor Thomas H. Kean, the former president of Drew University in Madison, NJ.

Cash awards of \$5,000 each were presented to the remaining finalists:

Eugene Cheslock, M.D. of Little Silver, a retired oncologist and hematologist, is president of the Parker Family Health Center in Red Bank. The Center, named after two revered Red Bank doctors, is a volunteer-based clinic that provides healthcare for the uninsured in Monmouth County. In 1999, Cheslock and several volunteers went door-to-door to 400 homes in Red Bank and asked residents whether they had health insurance. The results? Overall, 40 percent lacked it. The doctor established the clinic, initially in a trailer, and now 200 doctors, dentists, nurses and other medical professionals donate their time and talent. The Center logs about 10,000 patient visits each year.

Ryan and Charity Haygood of Newark established Christ's Heart Offering Satisfaction for Every Need, C.H.O.S.E.N., to reach at-risk youth in Newark. The group meets each Friday night at St. John's Baptist Church to answer one of life's most important questions: What am I here for? The Haygoods' answer is clear: it's the size of a person's heart and the good deeds they do that matters. Mr. Haygood, a lawyer, and Mrs. Haygood, a teacher, have combined their professional acumen to steer youth through challenges including relationships, setting and achieving goals, joy, disappointments, dealing with gangs, inner-city life, decision making, forgiveness and salvation. C.H.O.S.E.N. prepares the teens for purpose driven living by developing and supporting spiritual growth, character, educational excellence, leadership skills, community serve and financial responsibility.

Claire Insalata Poulos of Englewood recognized that the rescue of excess fresh foods from restaurants could significantly address the problem of hunger and poor nutrition faced by thousands in her community. In 1998, with a donated vehicle and two employees, she began Table to Table. Poulos and her "crew" picked up fresh leftover food from three restaurants and a few supermarkets and delivered the goods to a handful of soup kitchens in Paterson. The pick-ups expanded to corporate cafeterias, caterers and country clubs as did the range of places receiving the daily bounty: homeless shelters, HIV medical day centers, homes for the aged, drug rehabilitation centers, pantries for the working poor and agencies for victims of domestic violence. Today, Table to Table is recognized as one of the most effective and cost-efficient food rescue programs in the country. This year, the agency plans to redistribute food from more than 100 donors to serve more than 6.5 million meals to more than 50 local agencies at a cost of less than 10 cents per meal.

In 2004 **Faith Rice of Califon** designed and created The New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome, a new model of support for children and families affected by the disorder. Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary motor and vocal movements called tics. Her purpose stems from struggling to get an accurate diagnosis for her son 20 years ago. This collaborative program, created with help from the State of New Jersey, is the only one of its kind. The Center offers referrals and support for families, public awareness programs, education efforts to train professionals and support for genetic research for better treatments and a cure. The organization has trained more than 50,000 New Jersey teachers, administrators, guidance counselors and social workers to identify Tourette syndrome and to accommodate students in the classroom.

Michael Ruane of Belford and **Erika Rech of Middletown** are the founders of Breast Friends Forever. In 2006 the cousins learned that three family members had been diagnosed with the

disease and underwent double mastectomies. They knew there were many others in their community struggling with the financial and emotional burdens of breast cancer. They pooled their money, contacted a lawyer to set up a not-for-profit organization and launched Breast Friends Forever to provide emotional, intellectual and financial support and other resources to patients and their families. Recently, the teens organized a gala, Celebration of Hope, Determination and Courage, and raised more than \$37,000 in one evening. They also participated in Make A Difference Day to educate women and girls about the importance of breast self-examinations.

The compassion exhibited by **Shaindy Schorr**, a **Lakewood** resident and eighth grade teacher, has extended far beyond the classroom. For the past 15 years, Schorr's house has been a refuge for troubled teenage girls in need. She has hosted more than 25 girls in her home. Schorr helps ensure the girls remain drug and alcohol free and helps them rehabilitate their lives. Five years ago, Schorr took her open house policy to a new level. In addition to caring for a son with Down syndrome, she took in a then 2-year old girl from Lakewood who was paralyzed from the neck down in a car accident and whose parents did not have the means to care for her. Now, the girl is in the second grade.

Through his volunteer service with Pressing Toward the Mark Outreach Ministry, **Adolphus The Simuel SimmScott Jr.** of **Newark** has impacted the lives of hundreds of people by helping them get off drugs, find housing, regain custody of their children and become productive members of society. During the 12 years it's been in existence, Pressing Toward the Mark has served a hot meal to 30 to 60 men and women on a weekly basis and has helped them overcome their addictions. Scott pays all of the expenses for these services. His model for helping people is to love them and expose them to a different way of life. Last year, Pressing Toward the Mark became a New Jersey State Licensed Intensive Outpatient Facility.

Mary Lou Wallace of **Woodcliff Lake** has been involved with Project ASK, Activities for Special Kids, for more than 30 years. The program provides training and support to Special Olympians in the northern part of Bergen County. Wallace, the mother of a Special Olympian, recruits the coaches, volunteers and athletes who compete in basketball, volleyball, softball, bowling and track and field events. She also does the paperwork and keeps track of medical forms and event schedules. Through Project ASK, Wallace also organized a social club for special teens. Grants and private funding have allowed her to offer dances, pottery classes, apple picking trips and other activities for free.

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