

First Lady Mary Pat Christie Recognizes Union City Music Project's Melina Garcia for her Commitment To Improving Lives of Local At-Risk Youth

Thursday, February 12, 2015

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Union City Resident is named First New Jersey Hero of 2015



Trenton, NJ - Melina Garcia felt a "calling" to help the young people of Union City develop a love for music while keeping them off the streets and out of trouble. In 2011, she created the Union City Music Project, an afterschool program that works to change the lives of at-risk children through instrumental music education. For her commitment to improving the lives of at-risk youth, First Lady Mary Pat Christie has named its executive director Melina Garcia as the first New Jersey Hero of 2015 for her commitment to improving the lives of local at-risk youth. She is the 32nd Garden State resident to be chosen as a New Jersey Hero.

"Melina's story is so inspiring," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie.

"She was born in Venezuela, grew up in Brooklyn and later moved to Union City with her husband. Taking a page from her childhood, she developed a program that is helping to address the challenges of underserved youth in her hometown. Through the Union City Music Project, Melina is providing an educational and social outlet that positively channels the creativity of the children in the community. She is truly a role model and I am proud to make her our first New Jersey Hero of 2015."

The Union City Music Project is built upon the principles of *E/Sistema*, a music education program that promotes social change through the ideals of community and citizenship. Through the program, children are taught valuable life skills from self-esteem and self expression to teamwork discipline and creativity. The goal is to inspire and motivate the children to become well-rounded individuals and better citizens. Parents are involved throughout the program.

Currently, there are 65 children enrolled in the program who receive 24 hours of musical instruction each month. All musical instruments are donated and parents pay a \$100 participation fee to enroll their child in the program. Scholarships are available for those who are unable to meet the participation fee.

The youth orchestra has performed at places including the United Palace in New York as well as New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark. The program also provides opportunities to see creative arts in action such as their recent visit to Lincoln Center to see *The Nutcracker*.

"I'm very grateful to have been chosen for the New Jersey Hero Award. It's really an honor to receive recognition for the work the Union City Music Project does on behalf of the children and families it serves," said executive director Melina Garcia. "For more than two years, the UCMP has given over 100 children access to low-cost orchestral music education, field trips and performances, all of which create life-changing opportunities for them."

"Children need extracurricular activities like UCMP's After School Project that allow them to build confidence, develop discipline, expand creativity, cultivate cultural awareness, and promote community involvement so they can reach their full potential. Thanks to the tireless and unconditional support of our teaching artists, parents, and volunteers, UCMP is expanding beyond Union City to reach even more children throughout Hudson County, and is helping make a better New Jersey for everyone."

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Those interested in becoming involved with the Union City Music Project can do so in several ways, including sponsoring a child by covering the annual \$100 participation fee; donating a new or used musical instrument; or volunteering at a UCMP event. For more information or to become a participant, visit <http://www.ucmusicproject.org/>.

New Jersey Heroes is an initiative First Lady Mary Pat Christie began in 2010 to showcase the positive and unique ways people and organizations are impacting New Jersey and their communities. To nominate a hero, go to newjerseyheroes.org and follow the application instructions to submit the person you believe is a true New Jersey Hero.



First Lady Mary Pat Christie with New Jersey Hero Melina Garcia, Music Director Samuel Marchan and Union City Music Project students.

First Lady Mary Pat Christie visits music class with Melina Garcia, executive director of the Union City Music Project.

Music Director Samuel Marchan, First Lady Mary Pat Christie and New Jersey Hero Melina Garcia.

Press Contact:
Michael Drewniak
Kevin Roberts
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000