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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Honors Dana Spett of Pony Power Therapies for her Commitment to Improving Life Skills for Children and Adults with Autism and other Developmental Disabilities

Wednesday, April 17, 2013

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Names Mahwah Resident 20th New Jersey Hero



Trenton, NJ – Yesterday, First Lady Mary Pat Christie recognized Dana Spett, Executive Director of Pony Power Therapies in Mahwah, as her 20th New Jersey Hero. Inspired by her love of riding and social work, Dana established Pony Power in 2000 to provide children and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities with therapeutic riding and equine-assisted activities. She learned about this unique field of riding when she researched alternative therapies for one of her daughters with mild special needs.

"Dana and her staff are doing amazing work at Three Sisters Farm," said Mrs. Christie. "It's such a nurturing environment. You can see the special relationship that

is formed between the students and the horses. The expression of joy on the faces of each of the riders as they gain more self-esteem, independence and pride is priceless. I'm proud to name Dana Spett a New Jersey Hero for her commitment to give life-changing learning experiences to our special needs children, adults and their families."

During her visit, Mrs. Christie toured Three Sisters Farm and also observed several of the therapeutic riding sessions in the center ring.

"I am beyond humbled by this honor of being named a New Jersey Hero," said Dana Spett, Executive Director of Pony Power Therapies. "This is truly a reflection of a need being met by grace, compassion, community and the simplicity of healing with horses. It has been through a need in my own family, along with the privilege of being a lifelong equestrian with an education in social work, that I have come to share the magic and healing experienced through the human/horse interaction. Therapeutic riding and equine-assisted activities are an incredible treatment modality for virtually any need, whether it is physical, emotional, communication based, or circumstantial. I can only hope that this honor will provide a greater awareness of how impactful horses can be."

What started on a local barn in 2000 with four riders and just one horse has expanded significantly. Today, Pony Power Therapies operates from a picturesque farm in Mahwah with 14 seasoned therapy horses and ponies that service 150 scheduled clients per week. Currently, there are 10 staff members who are assisted by over active 120 volunteers.

In addition to autistic and special needs populations, Pony Power provides services to other specialized groups, including equine-assisted learning sessions for behavioral and emotional issues; sibling riding lessons; parent support groups; programming for disabled veterans and hippotherapy provided by licensed occupational therapist. In June 2012, Pony Power Therapies became a PATH International Premier Accredited Center.

Educators and parents who have used the program continue to meaningful results for their student participants, from smiling faces to nonverbal students communicating in complete sentences for the first time.

New Jersey Heroes is an initiative of First Lady Mary Pat Christie that showcases the positive and unique ways people and organizations are impacting New Jersey and their communities

To nominate a hero, go to <http://newjerseyheroes.org/index/> and follow the application instructions and submit the person you believe is a true New Jersey Hero.

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Photo 1: First Lady Mary Pat Christie Participates in Therapy Session at Pony Power Therapies on Three Sisters Farm in Mahwah.

Photo 2: First Lady Mary Pat Christie Honors Dana Spett, Executive Director of Pony Power Therapies at Three Sisters Farm in Mahwah.

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