

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
609-777-2600
Tim Wright @ Office of Volunteerism
(609) 292-6077

RELEASE: June 4, 1999

Governor Whitman Honors Award-Winning Volunteers

Gov. Christe Whitman honored ten individuals and groups from across New Jersey for exemplary volunteer service during a ceremony at Drumthwacket this morning

Selected by a panel of judges to receive a 1999 Governor's Volunteer Award, the honorees were chosen from 450 nominations submitted in March to the Governor's Office of Volunteerism by non-profit service clubs, schools, and program administrators.

"Volunteers demonstrate for all of us the very best in public service," the Governor said. "And the ten people and organizations being honored today represent some of the most dedicated volunteers we have in New Jersey."

The 12th annual Governor's Volunteer Awards demonstrate the Governor's admiration and respect for volunteer contributions made by New Jersey citizens to improve the state's communities. In 1998, Gov. Whitman made her own pledge to volunteerism - and challenged other New Jerseyans to follow her lead -- by promising to spend time each month reading for Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic. This year, the Governor added to her volunteer activities a pledge to spend at least one day per month teaching state government and history to fourth grade students throughout the state.

The awards were started by Governor Thomas Kean.

The honorees for 1999, listed by award category, are:

The Arts: Since 1991, **Dr. Victor Parsonnet**, Millburn, Essex County, has served as Chairman of the Board of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. His leadership helped to resolve severe financial and management challenges, bringing the orchestra to new health. He is a strong advocate for cooperation among different arts groups to foster New Jersey's overall cultural enrichment. Professionally, Dr. Parsonnet is director of Surgical Research at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center.

Benefiting Seniors: The **Peer Counseling Program**, Lakewood, Ocean County, is a group of trained seniors who offer support and counseling to other seniors addressing life changes. The program helps individuals to address the aging process and issues of loss, and to seek referral to additional social services. The program also reduces the stigma of seeking mental health services. Started in 1994 by Preferred Behavioral Health of NJ, the program has involved sixty-nine volunteers and offered assistance to dozens of Ocean County residents.

Benefiting Youth: Students from the **Piscataway Regional Day School**, Piscataway, Middlesex County, volunteer at **Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital**, New Brunswick, through a program initiated five years ago by the hospital. The program facilitates the development of the Day School's physically- and mentally-challenged youth. Students come to Robert Wood Johnson to be involved in a range of hospital-related volunteer activities, serving the general patient base. Although it is technically the hospital that is receiving the award, since they developed a program to benefit youth, it seemed appropriate to also recognize students who provide the direct services.

Education: **Mark Bombace**, Ridgewood, Bergen County, created R.O.C.K., Recycling Old Computers for Kids, a non-profit that revamps discarded, out-dated computer equipment and distributes it to families that cannot afford home computers. He also works with private donors and Microsoft to secure the right versions of current computer software. To date, the program has helped thirty students from Ridgewood's Orchard School. Bombace is a firefighter in Ridgewood.

The Environment: Working since 1987, **Alliance for a Living Ocean**, North Beach Haven, Ocean County, has conducted lobbying and public education campaigns to encourage appreciation and protection of the Jersey Shore. The group's focus is reducing non-point specific sources of pollution and working with government to enact environmentally beneficial legislation, such as New Jersey's 1989 Medical Waste Tracking Law. The group has a speakers' bureau and reaches out to children's groups. AOL also works in cooperation with business to achieve balanced results.

Health: In cooperation with Kimball Medical Center, Lakewood, **Shirley Weinberg** of Barnegat, Ocean County, has brought a mobile mammography program to Long Beach Island since 1991. A van arrives twice a year in Barnegat and, by pre-arranged appointment, screens women for breast cancer and provides public education on breast wellness. The screenings are provided at minimal cost. Through her advocacy, Weinberg, a cancer survivor, has enabled hundreds of women to be better informed on their personal health, reducing the incidence of breast cancer detected too late.

Human Needs: After learning in the late 1980's that there was not a domestic violence shelter in her suburban area, **Evelyn Jacobs Ortner** of Short Hills, Essex County, became a tireless advocate for battered women. She founded and directs The Unity Group, Inc., an all-volunteer organization that provides support to victims of domestic violence and their children. Ortner is the overall administrator and fundraiser, and provides direct client services. The group was recently able to purchase its own shelter in suburban West Essex. Her message is that women in all walks of life can be victims of domestic violence.

Long Term Service: **Marvin Cranmer** has been an active member and leader of the Ship Bottom Volunteer Fire Company for sixty-five years. Since joining in 1934, the Ocean County resident has held all positions, including Foreman, Assistant Chief, and Chief, and has served as a Trustee. Cranmer also does public education, willingly shares his knowledge with new recruits, and participates in all company-sponsored community activities. He is 88 years old, and holds one of the longest service records for volunteer firefighter service New Jersey.

Mobilization of Volunteers: Since last September, volunteers from the **Junior League of Montclair Newark, Inc.** have worked with welfare-to-work clients of The First Occupational Center of New Jersey in Orange. The volunteers assist women in transition to learn job skills and facilitate the job placement program. Serving as mentors and tutors, the volunteers are also working to expand the level of corporate and community support for the welfare-to-work program. By sharing their time and talent, educated and financially secure women are helping other women to escape poverty and unemployment. The award was presented to Human Services Commissioner Michele Guhl, as the volunteer effort supports a key department initiative.

Public Safety: Assisting the local Neptune Township Police Department, the **Ocean Grove Citizen's Patrol, Inc.**, a group of 113 volunteers ranging in age from 21 to 80, perform street surveillance and neighborhood watches to keep Ocean Grove safe and secure. Organized in 1990 following a local robbery, members receive training from the police department. The patrol also renders traffic assistance for parades and special events. Funding for the patrol comes from a local annual fund drive. Recently, the patrol has also provided community watch assistance to neighboring municipalities.