

First Lady Mary Pat Christie Announces Recipients of 2nd Annual Spirit of a Hero Scholarship

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Trenton, NJ – First Lady Mary Pat Christie announced \$110,000 in New Jersey Heroes Spirit of a Hero Scholarships today during a ceremony at Drumthwacket, the Governor's official residence in Princeton. Twenty-two students from throughout the state will each be receiving a \$5,000 scholarship to pursue post-secondary education opportunities. Mrs. Christie launched the scholarship program in 2013.

"This year's Spirit of a Hero recipients are a deserving group of young people who are making a difference and changing lives in their communities," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. "From anti-bullying programs and initiatives for the homeless to redistributing musical instruments to students in need, I'm overwhelmed by the commitment to service and volunteerism demonstrated by these young men and women. New Jersey Heroes is once again proud to recognize their accomplishments and provide this scholarship program to help them pursue a successful future."

The twenty-two scholarship winners are:

- Zachary Certner, Morristown High School, Morristown (Morris): Zachary co-founded a non-profit foundation called SNAP (Special Needs Athletic Programs) that provides 150 families who have special needs children with free athletic and social programs five nights a week. His most recent endeavor has been a special needs education and anti-bullying initiative, called Empathy Training, which he has shared with over 3,000 students in the tri state area, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Florida. Zachary will be attending Duke University this fall.

- Tyler Davis Connellan, Saint Rose High School, Belmar (Monmouth): Four years ago, Tyler created "Cheer Up with Make-Up," a program for children in the pediatric wing of Jersey Shore Medical Center. Since then, she has spent on average of 3 hours a week at the hospital lifting the spirits of pediatric patients by providing manicures, pedicures, hair-styling, and temporary tattoos. This successful program is now being expanded to Monmouth Medical Center. Tyler will be attending Villanova University College of Nursing this fall.
- Brett Parker Conrads, Newton High School, Andover (Sussex): As an Eagle Scout and a member of the Pass It Along Foundation, Brett has been involved with an amazing number of volunteer opportunities. In addition to his most recent project of implementing a handicap accessible flower garden at a local senior citizen home, he dedicates his time to various Aids and Cancer Walks, his church, and athletic programs for developmentally disabled members of his community. Brett will be attending the New Jersey Institute of Technology this fall.
- Ashley Suzanne Craig, High Point Regional High School, Wantage (Sussex): Four years ago, Ashley created the non-profit foundation S.A.B.B. – Students Against Being Bullied. As a victim of bullying herself, Ashley knows the importance of having resources for young people to reach out to in times of distress, the goal of her non-profit. Ashley has given over 120 presentations, implemented the program at her own high school and has committed thousands of hours to make SABB a success. Ashley will be attending Eastern Kentucky University or Sussex Community College this fall.
- Joelle Marie Feshuk, Mainland Regional High School, Linwood (Atlantic): Joelle has been incredibly involved with her school's Key Club over the past 4 years, serving as President her junior year. As President she increased membership by over 127% and surpassed all fundraising goals. Ashley also serves as the Lieutenant Governor on the NJ District Board of Trustees and leads their fundraising efforts. In addition to her work with Key Club, she volunteers her time at the Jersey Shore Medical Center, peer mentoring special needs and at-risk students, and with FACES (Families of Autistic Children Education and Support). She will be attending Tulane University this fall.
- Jeremy Brandon Garriga, Hudson County Schools of Technology/Academy of Technology & Design, Jersey City (Hudson): In his sophomore year, Jeremy began volunteering at the Hoboken Shelter, providing daily meals for people in need. While at the Shelter, he noticed many people at the shelter were without socks. After researching the topic, he found information to suggest that the average homeless person walks up to 14 miles per day. So in 2011, he founded a non-profit foundation called Soxcess, an initiative to provide needy individuals with brand new socks. Through this program, he has provided thousands of socks to the four major shelters in Hudson County. Jeremy is attending Seton Hall University where he will study Molecular Biology.
- Meghan Knecht, Haddonfield Memorial High School, Haddonfield (Camden): In her sophomore year, Meghan started "Stand Up for Camden," a student group involved in fundraising and volunteer activities that benefit the citizens of Camden. In its first year, the organization met its goal of raising \$3,000 and as a result, was able to pay tuition for a child in Camden to attend kindergarten at the Urban Promise Academy. This would be the first of many acts of kindness "Stand Up for Camden" would accomplish. The group now has 80 members who work every day to connect with students living in Camden. Meghan will be attending Drexel University this fall.
- Katherine Theresa Leopold, Ridge High School, Basking Ridge (Somerset): Katherine who has been a Girl Scout for the past twelve years, found time to volunteer and lead many groups and clubs at school and in her community. In 2012, she co-founded the Operation Smile Club at the Somerset Hills YMCA, attending the International Student Leadership Conference and learning about Operation Smile Missions around the world. She also served for 4 years in the Ridge Against Drugs student group, which educates students on healthy living and smart choices, such as avoiding drugs and alcohol. Katherine is attending Georgetown University this fall.
- Dominick A. Leyda, Point Pleasant Borough High School, Point Pleasant (Ocean): Since 2010, Dominick has volunteered at the Alcoe Garden's Residential Alzheimer's Facility every Wednesday afternoon. He spends his time providing entertainment and companionship to the patients with Alzheimer's and Dementia. In addition, Dominick has been an avid volunteer for the Joan Dancy & PALS Foundation, helping local residents afflicted with ALS to lead as normal a life as possible. He will be attending The College of New Jersey this fall.
- Stuart John McGibbon, Hunterdon Regional Central High School, Flemington (Hunterdon): Stuart co-founded the non-profit, "My Friend Ryan", which supports Asperger's Syndrome awareness & advocacy. After his brother, Ryan, was diagnosed with Asperger's at the age of 6, Stuart noticed that his brother would regularly be mistreated by those around him, not out of malice, but out of ignorance. Through "My Friend Ryan," he is able to bring awareness and education to the public regarding individuals diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome.
- Vanessa Loren Mirasola, Weehawken High School, West New York (Hudson): Two years ago, Vanessa started her high school's first Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). She believes very strongly that students need to have a place to go to feel safe and accepted. Through GSA, Vanessa and her club members organize fundraisers, such as a charity fashion show. Ninety percent of the proceeds from that show will go to local non-profit charities that work toward providing safe housing and counseling for LGBTQIA and HIV/AIDS positive youth. Vanessa will be attending Ramapo College of New Jersey where she will be studying Criminal Justice.
- David Seth Mitchell, Randolph High School, Randolph (Morris): Seth is deeply committed to his work with the non-profit HOPE worldwide and has led a variety of organization's programs and initiatives. Through HOPE, Seth has volunteered at food drives, Days of Service events, and partnered with his father to develop a Personal Fitness Challenge for the organization to implement nationwide. Recently, he worked to develop Teen HOPE, a program aimed at helping and supporting teenagers in the NY/NJ area. Seth will be attending University of Maryland – College Park this fall.
- Michelle Moffa, Holy Spirit High School, Linwood (Atlantic): Michelle has a passion for music, and in 2011 teamed up with fellow Spirit of a Hero recipient, Katie Rha, to found, 'Hearts in Harmony.' This student-run non-profit conditions, cleans and distributes used musical instruments to underprivileged students throughout southern New Jersey. Michelle is also involved in a number of community action initiatives in her school and the

surrounding area including tutoring, collecting books and school supplies, or repairing instruments. Michelle will be attending Duke University where she will be studying engineering.

- Jamani Montague, University High School, Newark (Essex): Jamani co-founded and serves as vice president for Youth Council for Global Unity (YCGU). Her non-profit aims to think critically and seek solutions for local, national and global issues. Outside of YCGU, Jamani is an active agent for change in her home community, volunteering her time and friendship to others through outreach, mentoring, and tutoring students. She hopes to study law and ultimately become an International Civil Rights Lawyer. Jamani will be attending Emory University in the fall.

- Gordon Oxley, Allentown High School, Clarksburg (Monmouth): For the past 3 years, Gordon has dedicated himself to his work as an Instructor at Celtic Charms Therapeutic Horse Park, where he connects with children affected by physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities. Working with his horse, Finn, Gordon helps these children with verbal development and socialization skills. Gordon will be attending Stevens Institute of Technology this fall.

- Christopher Raymond Painter, Columbia High School, Maplewood (Essex): Christopher has been involved in a number of volunteer activities including serving as a counselor for the National Youth Leadership Training Program, developing and teaching a robotics class curriculum. Earning the rank of Eagle Scout and leading his school as class president, he has earned the respect of peers and made a profound impact on his local community. Christopher will be attending the University of Pennsylvania's Jerome Fisher Program in Management and Technology in the fall.

- Alexandra Pilla, Randolph High School, Randolph (Morris): Three years ago, Alexandra initiated the Rachel's Challenge: Friends of Rachel Club at her high school. This anti-bullying program serves as a platform for events and meetings to promote kindness in the school environment. She is also actively involved in her Parish, where she has coordinated food drives, serves on the Youth Council and assists in the children's ministry. Alexandra will be attending Boston College where she intends to study Political Science this fall.

- Kelly Elizabeth Pretz, Manasquan High School, Brielle (Monmouth): When Kelly was 10 years old, she was diagnosed with epilepsy. This has translated into a lifelong passion for raising and promoting epilepsy awareness. Kelly was able to turn what could be a devastating diagnosis into a call for action. Raising money for the Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey, creating a Teen Mentoring Program, traveling to Washington, DC to speak with congressional leaders, and writing and publishing a book, she has made a profound impact on global awareness of this seizure disorder. Kelly will be attending Bucknell University in the fall.

- Elizabeth Raffo, Seneca High School, Tabernacle (Burlington): Elizabeth stands as a founding member of her Parish Youth Group, Holy Eucharist Reaching Out (HERO). Through this organization, she works with peers to mobilize and bolster the local and global community. Recently, HERO performed outreach in Camden by providing homeless individuals with food and clothing. In addition, Elizabeth has spent much of her time volunteering with the Girl Scouts of America to execute various service projects and fundraisers. Elizabeth will be attending St. John's University where she will be studying International Business this fall.

- Jacklyn Stefanie Rapport, Health Science Academy, Lawrenceville (Mercer): Jacklyn has a passion for science. Upon learning that the United States lags behind other nations in science scores, she was empowered to translate that passion into a vehicle to engage with other students. For her Girl Scout Gold Project, Jacklyn organized a countywide science fair. This project brought together students from her local community and helped them to think critically, find a sense of self-empowerment and consider careers in the field of science. Jacklyn will be attending Drew University in the fall where she will be studying Biology, on a pre-med track.

- Katie Rha, Mainland Regional High School, Linwood (Atlantic): Katie co-founded 'Hearts in Harmony' with fellow Spirit of a Hero Recipient, Michelle Moffa. Their organization collects, reconditions and distributes used musical instruments to less fortunate students in the local community. Katie also serves as a member of the TRI-M Music Honors Society. She was able to forge a partnership between this society and her non-profit to coordinate free musical lessons to young students. Katie also has participated in a variety of volunteer projects such as organizing events, collecting and distributing food at the holidays, and tutoring students in the fields of math and science. Katie will be attending The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill in the fall.

- Netanya Stein, James Caldwell High School, West Caldwell (Essex): Netanya has volunteered with The Friendship Circle for five years. Each week, she visits a boy with severe autism. Over the years, their relationship has grown immensely, witnessing first-hand the transformative power of friendship. Netanya also serves as the vice president of SPARK, an Intergenerational Service Project where members spend their Sunday mornings at a local nursing home conversing, playing games and sharing stories with residents. Netanya will be attending Binghamton University in the fall where she will be studying Human Development.

New Jersey Heroes worked with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and HESAA (Higher Education Student Assistance Authority) to promote the scholarship. This year, more than 700 students applied for the Spirit of a Hero Scholarship.

To be considered for the scholarship, candidates fulfilled several criteria, including a demonstrated commitment to volunteerism and community contribution; New Jersey residency; U.S. citizenship; submission of a high school transcript with a letter of recommendation from a current teacher or advisor; have good academic standing with their secondary school and enroll as a student at an accredited college/university or a vocational training school in the 2014-2015 school year (Fall or Spring Semester).

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 to submit the person you believe is a true New Jersey Hero.

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