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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Announces Candidates for February New Jersey Heroes Online Poll

Monday, February 22, 2016

Tags: [First Lady](#)

Trenton, NJ – First Lady Mary Pat Christie and the New Jersey Heroes Foundation today announced three deserving individuals as nominees for February's online New Jersey Heroes poll. Each of the candidates – **Lynne Azarchi of Kidsbridge Tolerance Center in Ewing; Zach Certner of Special Needs Athletic Programs (SNAP) in Morristown; and GinaMarie Raimondo of Bullying... We're Kickin' It in Manalapan** – are being recognized for their efforts to make a difference in their communities by encouraging youth empowerment, tolerance and acceptance of others.

Beginning today, Monday February 22nd through Friday, February 26th, the public will have an opportunity to choose the February New Jersey Hero by visiting <http://newjerseyheroes.org/index/poll/> to cast their selection.

"Our February New Jersey Hero nominees are each making a meaningful impact on children and young adults who may be experiencing harassment and intimidation at the hands of their peers," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. "I applaud Lynne, Zach and GinaMarie for recognizing these young people deserve a voice, and for developing programs that teach tolerance of others and their differences. All three candidates are worthy of becoming our 40th New Jersey Hero."

Voters can cast their ballots once per day until the poll ends at 10:00 am Friday, February 26th. The February New Jersey Hero will be announced later that afternoon via press release.

This month's New Jersey Hero nominees are:

Lynne Azarchi – Kidsbridge Tolerance Center:



Lynne Azarchi embodies what it means to be an UPStander. She is a tireless advocate for those without a voice — at-risk youth across New Jersey who live in fear in their schools and online, as targets of bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment for being 'different', who suffer from the emotional/physical consequences that too often, can lead to tragic outcomes. As Founder & Executive Director of the Kidsbridge Tolerance Center, Lynne has, for the past 13 years, focused on developing immersive educational experiences for kids, teachers, and counselors, creating 'evidence-based' curricula and activities that are proven to change kids' lives and their futures. A genuine change agent, Lynne saw early on how the dismissive attitude of "kids just being kids" was leading to genuinely painful consequences for children, teens and parents. So partnering with her Kidsbridge Board, she led the charge to do something about it, creating the only youth tolerance center in the United States, now located in Ewing, NJ. Each year, more than 2,500 kids and 300 educators interact in small group discussions that focus on empathy, empowerment, stereotype knowledge, diversity awareness, moral reasoning, and respect. To date, more than 25,000 youth and their educators have learned the strategies needed to 'stand up and speak out.' Lynne researches and develops 'best practice' programs that empower kids to develop empathy and help targets/victims, stop bullying and be UPstanders rather than bystanders. Lynne's dedication to these kids has expanded into statewide programs including award and recognition competitions for youth and

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educators, an annual Walk2Stop Bullying, and other annual events. Learn more about Kidsbridge at www.kidsbridgecenter.org.

Zach Certner – SNAP's Kindness is Cool! Program:



Zachary Certner & Matthew Certner co-founded SNAP, Inc. (Special Needs Athletic Programs) to provide autistic children with sports programs to help them improve their social and athletic skills. Over the past ten years, SNAP has provided free or low-cost programs to special needs families. Six years ago they created a sensitivity training manual, with workshops designed to promote acceptance of special needs kids and to prevent bullying. By integrating props such as blindfolds, glasses, and balance balls, it helps people experience what it's like to have a disability. The Interactive Autism Network reported that 63% of children with autism (ages 6-15) have experienced bullying at some point in their lives. This program aims to lower that statistic and help put an end to bullying through education. Our program "Kindness is Cool" aims to educate third graders (the age we have deemed as most receptive) throughout Morris, Passaic, Somerset, and Sussex counties. Most children know someone with autism, however many of those same children cannot tell you what autism is. Our e-learning (online education seminars) serve as a kid-friendly, hands-on educational tool for students

to see what life is like in the shoes of children with disabilities. The SNAP series are approximately 45 minutes long and divided into four modules that focus on the importance of empathy, acceptance, and the inclusion for all. The e-Learnings introduce students to characters to imitate instances of bullying and then ask students "what would you do in this situation?" Thousands of children face teasing, bullying, and humiliation - on top of their personal day-to-day challenges. Our program will benefit a population of students that are often overlooked and underserved. Learn more at <http://www.snapelearning.org/>.

GinaMarie Raimondo – Bullying... We're Kickin' It:



Founder & Executive Director of Bullying... We're Kickin' It, GinaMarie Raimondo created an effective method of educating children on how to positively express and resolve interpersonal problems through the practical application of the Golden Rule "Do unto others..." Her unique approach led her to create the first and only antibullying and leadership center in the country that educates and supports children throughout their school and social journey with programs for children starting at age two. Bullying is personal, is delivered in many forms and for some, it can occur daily. GinaMarie's all-encompassing model reduces bullying at its core with myriad services improving the overall school and social climate. The Kickin' It Kids Center provides preschool programs, homeschool alternatives, afterschool workshops, summer camps, guardian workshops, mentoring, peer leadership and more. Children are taught character education, respectful social behaviors, youth empowerment, tolerance, acceptance, accountability, cultural and diversity appreciation, positive outlets and life skills. Kickin' It also provides educators, of all grade levels, with workshops required by NJ's

antibullying laws. GinaMarie's passion and determination created this highly regarded groundbreaking organization. However, according to her it's because of the loyal supporters and dedicated individuals that make Kickin' It so effective. Her humility and dedication are character traits of inspirational leadership and heroism. Learn more at: www.werekickinit.com

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.

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