

First Lady Mary Pat Christie Announces Recipients of Second Annual New Jersey Heroes Heart of a Hero Scholarship

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Walmart Partnership Provides 10 Deserving Military Service Members with \$50,000 in Educational Scholarships



Trenton, NJ – Broadening the Christie Administration's strong commitment to New Jersey's veterans, First Lady Mary Pat Christie announced yesterday the recipients of the second annual New Jersey Heroes *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship. Each of the ten recipients will receive a \$5,000 scholarship award to help pursue a post-secondary education or vocational training. In June, Walmart continued its support of the program by donating \$50,000 to assist New Jersey's military service members make their higher education and career goals a reality.

"Our courageous military servicemembers and veterans have sacrificed so much to protect freedom and democracy," said

Mrs. Christie. "I'm honored that through our partnership with Walmart, New Jersey Heroes is once again able to provide *Heart of a Hero* educational scholarships to these ten deserving servicemen and women to pursue their desired career paths. The Governor and I offer our congratulations and heartfelt thanks for their commitment and service to our state and nation."

The ten *Heart of a Hero* recipients are:

Technical Sergeant Robert Abato, US Airforce (38), McGuire AFB: A Senior at American Military University, Robert is involved in many community service activities, including supporting Sport Aiding the Medical Research for Kids, or SPARKS. Since becoming involved with the organization, Robert has raised over \$10,000 and spent hundreds of hours volunteering. This scholarship will help him complete his Master of Science, Environmental Policy and Management degree.

Sergeant Jonathan Bowker, NJ Army National Guard (25), Cranbury: A Junior at Rider University, Jonathan joined the Cranbury Volunteer Fire Department at the age of 16, serving his town for the past 9 years. The *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship will help Jonathan obtain his degree from the College of Business Administration in Marketing and Advertising.

Senior Airman Meredith Fleece, US Airforce (31), Belmar: After losing her brother to leukemia, Meredith became involved in the fight against cancer through Relay for Life. More recently, in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, she worked with Family Promise of Monmouth County, helping families affected by the storm. A Senior at Monmouth University, Meredith is pursuing a career in social work with the military population.

Staff Sergeant Chivonne Green, NJ Air National Guard, (32), Pemberton: A Junior at Moore College of Art & Design, Chivonne is active in the Boys & Girls program at her church and assist with hosting events that keep children and teens off the streets and mentors two thirteen year-old girls in her community. This scholarship will help Chivonne attain her goal of becoming a licensed interior designer.

Specialist Kevin Parks, US Army (28), Highland Park: A third year medical student at Rutgers, Kevin noticed a need to help the veteran community on campus. He and two friends began RU-SERVS (Rutgers University-Services, Education and Resources for Veterans). The *Heart of a Hero Scholarship* will help Kevin achieve his medical degree.

Specialist James Raczowski US Army (26) Brigantine: A Freshman at the New York Academy of Art, James has volunteered at Covenant House in Atlantic City, teaching poetry to homeless at-risk youth. As a classically trained artist and combat veteran, James' goal is to use his art to help others better understand those who have experienced combat. This scholarship will help attain that goal.

Airman First Class Rebecca Roberts, US Airforce (18), Millville: A Sophomore at Rowan University, Rebecca has spent much of her time tutoring special needs children at the elementary school she attended as a child. The *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship will help Rebecca pursue a degree in Political Science.

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Captain Christopher Southard, U.S. Marines (33) Margate: Currently serving overseas in Liberia, Christopher is working to obtain his graduate degree for a Master of Science Degree in Criminal Justice. Despite being on military assignments, he has been able to volunteer his time over the past nine years to the Mary Theresa Sher Foundation.

Sergeant Ericka Steele, US Marines (29), Ocean: A Senior at Monmouth University, Ericka volunteers her time by giving back to veterans through the Work Vessels for Veterans organization, giving hundreds of hours of service to help the veteran community. This scholarship will help her complete her Bachelor's degree in Business Management.

Captain Michelle Williams, NJ Air National Guard (34), Chesterfield: Michelle volunteers her time and resources to support fellow Airmen and their families through events like Family Day and makes herself available to pick up deployments of men and women who want to be home with their families during the holidays. The Heart of a Hero Scholarship will help Michelle pursue a Master Degree in Social Work.

"Walmart is proud to join First Lady Mary Pat Christie in support of the New Jersey Heroes *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship Program," said Amy Corso, Director of Operations for Walmart Stores of Metro New York. "At Walmart, we recognize the service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans and are committed to preparing them for successful professional lives both during and after their service in the military."

For last year's recipients, the *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship is helping to attain educational and career goals, including the completion of a Bachelor of Arts in Marketing degree in Marketing and providing assistance in alleviating financial burdens such as tuition fees, books, and graduate school applications.

To be considered for the *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship, applicants were required to meet several program criteria: 1) be a United States citizen and New Jersey resident; 2) be a high school graduate or have a high school equivalency diploma (GED); 3) served in the military; 4) submit a letter stating goals and how the scholarship will be used; 5) enroll as a student at an accredited college/university or a vocational training school in pursuit of a degree for the 2013-14 school year; 6) demonstrate a commitment to volunteerism and community contribution, in the spirit of New Jersey Heroes.

Yesterday's scholarship announcement builds upon the Christie Administration's ongoing commitment to New Jersey's military service members and veterans. The Governor recently signed a series of jobs-related legislation to help get the state's military heroes and their families back to work.

In addition, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development continues to partner with the New Jersey Building and Construction Trades Council through the Helmets to Hardhats program to give veterans skills and placement in the building trades and the Department has implemented the Operation Hire a Hero program to promote job opportunities for veterans by connecting to employers.

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 newjerseyheroes.org and follow the application instructions to submit the person you believe is a true New Jersey Hero.

PHOTO CAPTION: *First Lady Mary Pat Christie congratulates the 2013-2014 New Jersey Heroes Heart of a Hero Scholarship recipients.*

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