

# First Lady Mary Pat Christie Honors Operation Beachhead Founder Michael Ricci As 21st New Jersey Hero For Improving Lives of Disabled Veterans

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## Monmouth County Resident's Surf Clinic Program Offers Adaptive Sport Activities for Wounded Veterans



Trenton, NJ – Continuing her efforts to recognize everyday New Jerseyans doing remarkable things in their communities, First Lady Mary Pat Christie today honored Michael Ricci, founder of Operation Beachhead in Sea Girt, as her 21st New Jersey Hero. Ricci, a combat-decorated veteran who served in Vietnam and sustained permanent injuries, began Operation Beachhead three years ago as a means to bring adventurous and challenging therapy activities to disabled U.S. military veterans. This year, the surf clinic program has expanded to include people with disabilities.

"I applaud Michael for shining a light on our disabled veterans," said Mrs. Christie. "Whatever their injuries, physical or emotional, Operation Beachhead is providing a structured, yet unique therapeutic experience for these courageous New Jerseyans. Even more inspiring is how this program has grown to include individuals with disabilities, further demonstrating Michael's commitment to enhancing the lives of others. I am proud to name him a New Jersey Hero."

Ricci, who has a Master's Degree in Counseling, has guided veterans for over 30 years on issues of substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder and has been active with disabled veterans organizations throughout the years.

Under the watchful eyes of the Sea Girt lifeguards and assisted by trained instructors and volunteers, each "storming the surf" event can accommodate up to ten participants. Activities include surfing, paddle boarding, kayaking, boogie boarding and sailing.

"I live in a constant state of awe and wonder, along with a thankfulness of my life for all the gifts I have been given. Operation Beachhead is one of those gifts," said Michael Ricci, founder of Operation Beachhead. "It gives me great joy to share this extraordinary present with the participants and many volunteers. I consider myself a vessel, and would not be able to do this without the countless volunteers, friends and family, all who are so supportive. This recognition will mean a great deal to Operation Beachhead as it will increase awareness to our communities and to those that can benefit from our unique program, giving all who partake a sense of Adventure, Inspiration, and Recreation. Thank you for honoring me with this award today."

Upcoming "storm the surf" events include a Lyons VA Beach Day for disabled veterans of the Lyons campus on July 13, 2013 and Active Duty Beach Day on July 27, 2013 for active duty military members. Both events will be on the beach in Sea Girt.

For more information about Operation Beach Head, visit <http://opbeachhead.org/>.

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



First Lady Mary Pat Christie with New Jersey Hero Michael Ricci, Founder of Operation Beachhead and volunteers.



First Lady Mary Pat Christie greets Operation Beachhead participant in Sea Girt.

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