

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

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Partnership with Walmart Provides Military Service Members with \$100,000 in Educational Scholarships



Trenton, NJ – Continuing the Christie Administration’s commitment to New Jersey’s veterans, First Lady Mary Pat Christie today announced the ten recipients of the New Jersey Heroes *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship. Each of the recipients will receive \$10,000 to help pursue a post-secondary education or vocational training. In June, Walmart donated \$100,000 to the program to assist New Jersey’s military service members make their higher education and career goals a reality.

“Our veterans, past and present, are an extension of our greater New Jersey family,” said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. “We thank our private-sector partners from

Walmart for helping us to initiate the *Heart of a Hero* scholarship so that our courageous service members can have an opportunity to achieve their dreams for a successful career and future. In the spirit of New Jersey Heroes, we are proud to help make a difference in the lives of these outstanding New Jerseyans who have served and sacrificed in the defense of our country and our freedoms.”

The ten *Heart of a Hero* recipients are:

- Sergeant James Adams, US Marine Corps (29), Colts Neck
- Corporal Hunter Carlos Alarcon, US Marine Corps (24), Flanders
- Airman First Class Vincent Justin Avallone, NJ Air National Guard (22), Mullica Hill
- Sergeant First Class Harvey L. Craig, US Army (44), North Brunswick
- Lance Corporal Giovanni DeBelli, US Marine Corps (22), Garfield
- Staff Sergeant James Scott Downing, US Army (29) Mays Landing
- Airman First Class Breanna Michelle Gagnon, NJ Air National Guard (20), Mays Landing
- Sergeant Sherri Renee Jones, US Army (45) Hackensack
- Staff Sergeant Lester Shelley, US Army (59), Somerset
- Airman First Class Andrew Michael Speight, US Air Force, (22), Westampton

“Walmart is proud to stand with First Lady Mary Pat Christie in funding the New Jersey Heroes *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship Program,” said Jennifer Hoehn, Senior Manager of Public Affairs for Walmart Stores, Inc. for New Jersey. “At Walmart, we recognize the service and sacrifice of our nation’s veterans and strive to support their heroism through programs like this one.”

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 2012-13 school year; 6) demonstrate a commitment to volunteerism and community contribution, in the spirit of New Jersey Heroes.

The *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship is one of the myriad ways the Christie Administration recognizes and supports its veterans. Other assistance ranges from vital programs provided by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veteran’s Affairs (DMAVA), including financial support and peer counseling services through the New Jersey National Guard State Family Readiness Council Fund and the Veteran to Veteran Peer Support Program telephone helpline to expansion of the successful Veterans Haven program to provide access to homeless veterans in the northern part of the state. The Veterans Haven facility in Gloucester County has helped nearly a thousand homeless veterans since

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opening in 1995.

In terms of jobs and career development, the Christie Administration, through the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, promotes job opportunities for veterans through the Operation Hire a Hero program as well as careers in the building trades through the Helmets to Hardhats program. Legislation was recently signed creating a pilot program called the VETeach Program to assist post-9/11 veterans transition into teaching careers. Governor Christie also signed legislation that awards high school diplomas to veterans who dropped out of school to serve in World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

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

Photo Caption: First Lady Mary Pat Christie, Adjutant General Michael L. Cunniff and Walmart Senior Manager of Public Affairs Jennifer Hoehn congratulate New Jersey's ten *Heart of a Hero* Scholarship recipients at Drumthwacket.

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