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**UNSUNG HEROES HONORED
WITHRUSS BERRIE AWARD FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

19 New Jersey Residents Honored for Giving Back to Their Communities

MAHWAH, N.J., June 1, 2006 – Through a chance encounter with a victim of domestic abuse, Sa'idah Sharif of Roselle experienced a personal call to help Muslim victims of domestic violence, drawing on her knowledge of Islamic culture to found the state's first support service for members of the Islamic community.

For her work as director of Baitul Hemayah (Arabic for "House of Protection"), Ms. Sharif was awarded the 2006 Russ Berrie Award for Making a Difference and the top award of \$50,000.

While working as the administrative coordinator in the emergency department of University Hospital in Newark, she met a Muslim woman waiting to speak to a social worker about the beatings she regularly endured at the hand of her husband. Since it was founded, Baitul Hemayah has provided referrals and counseling to more than 200 women. She plans to open a shelter in Newark. "With a building," she says, "I'll never have to turn anyone away."

In all, 19 finalists received cash grants during the Awards Ceremony, the 10th year that New Jersey's unsung heroes were recognized by the Russell Berrie Foundation and Ramapo College of New Jersey for their dedication, sacrifice and service. The top three finalists, chosen by a selection committee comprising eminent New Jersey business leaders and professionals, received cash awards of \$50,000, \$35,000 and \$25,000.

The \$35,000 award was given to Father Ronald Stanley of Midland Park, a Catholic campus chaplain who, for the last 30 years, has traveled to a small village in the remote mountains of the Dominican Republic to help build a stronger community. For the last decade, he has enlisted the aid of college students who travel with him and live among the poor farming families as they work to bridge the gap between the First and Third World peoples.

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Receiving the \$25,000 grant was 17-year-old, Anthony Marzocca of Wayne, who worked alongside his father to pull two children from a burning car after it hit tree and burst into flames. In 2001, he rescued a skier in distress who had skied off a cliff. For both actions, Anthony was recognized by the National Court of Honor for the Boy Scouts of America.

Late philanthropist and businessman Russ Berrie created the award in 1997. His widow, Angelica Berrie, shared his passion for giving and now leads the Russell Berrie Foundation's efforts to realize his philanthropic vision. "Russ wanted to create an award specifically for unsung heroes—people who really make a difference by dedicating their lives to improving life or helping others," she said.

Delivering the keynote address was former Governor and current Senate President Richard J. Codey. Emmy Award-winning broadcaster Steve Aduato hosted the awards program.

Sixteen finalists were presented awards of \$2,500 each. They include:

Amal Abdallah of Lyndhurst, who brought together teenage girls, some Muslim, some Jewish, and formed committees to raise funds (more than \$13,000 to date) to help out at the Palisades Emergency Residence Corporation, where they are launching a shelter for homeless families to complement the services to single homeless people.

Four decades of service as a volunteer with American Red Cross blood services and disaster services earned a nomination for Andrew Bertone of Rutherford, who has combined civic and government service throughout his lifetime.

Sentenced to life in prison at 22, Clyde Briggs of Somerset has dedicated his life to preventing young people from becoming involved with drugs, gangs and violence. He developed intervention strategies to deter youth from following a similar path, one of which resulted in the Lifer's Group, recognized for its Scared Straight program. Today he holds a full-time job and volunteers and works part-time to create positive alternatives to incarceration.

For 12 years, Fred Carl of Wall has worked tirelessly and personally invested \$30,000 to save Camp Evans as a history/science center. The U.S. Army camp, which served as a site for telecommunications research and development, is associated with many science luminaries including Marconi, Einstein and Alexander Graham Bell.

On a visit to Guatemala in 1999, Joe Collins of Morristown observed extreme poverty. After four years of spending summers and vacations there volunteering, he founded the nonprofit organization, Houses to Homes – Guatemala, which has built 32 houses since January 2005. Currently, with the help of 33 volunteers from 11 different countries, the organization is completing two houses a month. In addition, Collins now raises funds to pay for Guatemalan children to attend school.

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Monsignor Michael Doyle has spent more than 40 years fighting for the people of Camden and working to make his town a better place to live. Among his many accomplishments is the establishment of The Heart of Camden more than 20 years ago, an organization to renovate abandoned housing and assist low-income families to become homeowners, and a free health clinic for the uninsured.

Paul Gingras of Teaneck rescued two children from a horrific fire that claimed the lives of four others and badly injured their mother and nanny. As neighbors pointed their flashlights toward the burning home, he climbed a ladder through the dense smoke to the roof of the front porch, and was able to extend his hand to guide two little girls to safety.

Daria Lojik of Wayne has selflessly given of herself by volunteering for the first aid squad, fostering and adopting children in crisis and participating in numerous community service groups. A volunteer EMT for the Wayne First Aid Squad, she has opened her home to more than 70 abused and neglected children, adopting three boys and continuing to recruit new foster parents.

Carmela Lunt of Mendham is the founding president and executive director of Community Hope, a social service agency that creates housing and services for those with mental illnesses. As president of the board, she has governed the expansion of Project Hope, now known as Community Hope, from a single group home in Dover for five young adults to a continuum of supported housing serving 185 individuals with plans to serve 230 this year.

When 16-year-old T. J. Moehler of Bayville saw his 10-year old neighbor being bitten by a 75-pound pit bull dog, the teenager used the cast on his right arm to hit the dog and give the younger boy time to get to a nearby house and safety. Rescuers arrived to find T.J. on the roof of his mother's car as the dog continued to bite at his feet, and credited the teen's quick actions for possibly saving the life of his younger neighbor, who needed surgery to repair wounds to his hand, back and feet.

Joseph Obrochta of Woodcliff Lake donated a kidney to his best friend since the seventh grade, despite the risks associated with major surgery and the uncertainty of his future health. Garrett Gurrieri, who was diagnosed at age 12 with a rare kidney disease, endured two previous and ultimately unsuccessful transplants, says, "Joey gave my life back. He is a wonderful human being."

Wayne resident Leonard Pine, a retired optometrist, is hailed as the organizing force and major benefactor of the Foundation for the Handicapped, an organization that employs physically and mentally disabled persons from Passaic, Bergen, Morris and Essex Counties. He is now co-chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation, whose workshop provides hand-processing jobs such as parts labeling, product packaging, collating and assembly for people who are developmentally disabled or have multiple handicaps.

Douglas S. Roberts of Oxford is director of programs for The Seeing Eye, Inc., located in Morristown. Roberts, also an assessor for the International Guide Dog Federation, is acknowledged as the world's leading expert in guide dog programs, shaping the curriculum to adapt to a more dangerous world to provide safety and independence for 1,700 blind Americans and Canadians.

Sentenced to prison at age 17, Amani Shakur of Newark served as vice president of the Lifer's Group's Juvenile Awareness. Since his release, Shakur has brokered truces among street gangs and organized Street Warriors, a non-profit organization of former offenders who spread a pro-education, anti-violence message and opened a storefront youth center in Newark as a safe haven during the critical after-school and weekend hours.

Captain Bill Sheehan of Hackensack is founder of the Hackensack Riverkeeper to protect the environment and inhabitants of the river. As executive director, he provides environmental advocacy, education and conservation programs. He continues to lead eco-cruises of the Hackensack River Watershed, giving people an opportunity to see a range of wildlife - including bald eagles – from his boat. He is also chairman of the Meadowlands Conversation Trust, the state board charged with identifying and facilitating the acquisition of open space in the Meadowlands and throughout the watershed of the Hackensack River.

Wojtek Szyszko of Lawrenceville, an after-school volunteer with his town's fire company, used power rescue tools to extricate the passenger trapped in a sedan that collided with a tractor-trailer. Despite the possibility of an explosion, Szyszko worked for more than an hour to free the accident victims.

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