



Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award Announces Honorees for 26th Annual Ceremony

12 selfless New Jerseyans will be celebrated for their exceptional service to others

MAHWAH, N.J. – This past year, as the world began to step out of the shadow of the pandemic, unsung heroes from communities around New Jersey continued to demonstrate their passionate, unstoppable commitment to serving the most vulnerable among us.

On Friday, May 6, 2022, at 11:30 a.m., the Russell Berrie Foundation will recognize 12 of these unsung heroes from across the Garden State for their compassion and dedication at the 26th Annual Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award Ceremony.

Since 1997, the Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award has honored New Jersey residents whose outstanding acts of service and heroism have made a substantial impact on the lives of others. This year, awards totaling \$165,500 will be presented, bringing the total amount awarded since 1997 to \$3.9 million given to 408 Honorees, each of whom has an inspiring story to tell about how they made a difference.

“Our communities need more heroes – good-hearted people with an innate kindness – who give all of who they are to tackle problems others hesitate to attempt,” said Angelica Berrie, President, Russell Berrie Foundation. “From activists fighting injustice and systemic inequities, to neighbors helping neighbors struggling with basic needs, the remarkable individuals we honor this year have taken action to be the change we need to see in this world.”

Ramapo College of New Jersey manages the awards program and hosts the annual ceremony on behalf of the Russell Berrie Foundation.

This year’s Honorees are:

Diana Mejia of Morristown founded [Wind of the Spirit](#) over 20 years ago to provide support and legal services for immigrants and undocumented people in multiple communities in New Jersey. A committed immigration advocate, she has pushed for humane and just policies that allow immigrants to live with dignity and contribute fully to their communities. Diana will receive a \$50,000 award.

Quadeer Porter of Newark created [Brothers Building a Better Nation](#) to support young men of color who were incarcerated or have criminal history as they begin to create a better future for themselves and their families. He invests deeply in his clients, offering mentorship, employment services, housing assistance and counseling. Quadeer is the recipient of a \$35,000 award.

Samir Nichols of Camden started [Superior Arts Institute](#) when he was just 14 years old, which provides young people in the greater Camden area with an outlet for performance and production with a focus

on advocacy, racial justice and equity. The organization partners with local schools and community organizations to develop conscious, skilled, superior artists. Samir will receive a \$25,000 award.

Awards of \$7,500 will be presented to:

Al-Tariq Best of Newark created [the HUBB Center](#) and affiliated programs to help youth and parents in Essex County who have faced trauma by offering empowering experiences using arts, education, entrepreneurship, and access to mental health services.

Emily Dempsey is a sixth generation resident of **West Cape May** who has a lifetime of accomplishments including creating a [Center for Community Arts](#), supporting the creation of the Harriet Tubman Museum, and preserving African-American history in Cape May.

Nicholas Dirla of Bridgewater was just three months into his job as a UPS driver when he helped seven people escape rapidly rising floodwaters on Route 22 during Hurricane Ida, getting them safely into his truck and then out of the flooded area.

Stephanie Glover-Wilson of Bayonne is a champion of food equity who began feeding people in a park in Bayonne six years ago. Those early actions led to the launch of [Hunger Free Unity in the Community](#), which serves multiple communities in Hudson County with a 100% volunteer operation that continued to operate through the COVID pandemic.

Roger Hinton of Orange created the [Family Assistance Resource Center](#), a volunteer operation that provides direct, immediate assistance to economically vulnerable families in the greater Newark area who have lost their homes and possessions in fires, flooding, storm damage, and other disasters and connects them to other resources.

Shenee and Seigha Omuso of Burlington are the founders of [The Opportunity League](#), an organization focused on empowerment through sports, education and entrepreneurship for children and adults. They have recently launched the Villages Community Marketplace to create a grocery store/market with healthy foods in an underserved community.

Tanya and Matthew Veltz of East Orange reach into communities and assist vulnerable individuals in North Jersey through [Tree House Cares](#), a community health program that hosts health fairs and feeding programs. Since 2017, they have distributed 25 million pounds of food and clothing.

To learn more about each of the 2022 honorees, visit <https://www.ramapo.edu/berrie-awards/>.

About the Russell Berrie Foundation

The Russell Berrie Foundation was established in 1985 by Russell Berrie, an entrepreneur and philanthropist. He had a passion for giving that was grounded in his deep belief in humanity, the importance of touching the lives of ordinary people, the importance of strengthening the local community in New Jersey, and the power of using philanthropy to help achieve transformational change. The Russell Berrie Foundation seeks to continue Russ' mission by providing significant support to strengthen New Jersey's arts, cultural, and health care institutions, and celebrates everyday people who make a significant difference in the lives of others through the Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award.

About Ramapo College of New Jersey

Ramapo College of New Jersey, established in 1969, is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through learning and international and intercultural understanding. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice and is recognized as a top college by U.S. News & World Report, Kiplinger's, Princeton Review, and Money magazine, among others. The campus center for performing and visual arts is named in honor of Angelica and Russ Berrie.

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