

**NOMINATE A NEW JERSEY COMMUNITY CHANGEMAKER FOR
THE RUSS BERRIE MAKING A DIFFERENCE AWARD**

2024 Nominations Due February 9

Each person knows an individual who gives back to the community by creating positive change. **The Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award** has been recognizing those changemakers for almost 30 years. Nominations are open from now until February 9, 2024 for the 2024 awards.

Established by the late Russell Berrie and hosted by Ramapo College of New Jersey, the awards honor New Jersey residents whose outstanding community service and heroic acts have made a substantial impact on the lives of others.

With over 400 honorees since the inception of the Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award in 1997, more than \$4.1 million in cash awards have been presented to recognize the personal sacrifices and commitments these individuals have made to serve others. Their work is improving people's lives and making communities stronger. Nominees typically include community leaders, affinity groups, ethnic and religious organizations, nonprofit leaders, and volunteers, among many others. Their work promotes community service, volunteerism, social justice, community life, environmental issues, and a range of advocacy topics.

Ten outstanding changemakers will be honored at the 28th Anniversary Award Ceremony on May 10, 2024. There will be one top award of \$50,000, two \$25,000 awards, and up to seven \$7,500 awards.

"My father passionately believed that one person's actions to better the lives of others could inspire people to take similar action," said Scott Berrie, vice president of the Board of Trustees of The Russell Berrie Foundation, the Teaneck, NJ-based philanthropy that carries out Russ Berrie's legacy and charitable giving vision by recognizing New Jerseyans who are creating positive change in their communities. "We have been truly blessed to commemorate his vision and spirit by celebrating more than 400 incredible individuals, representing every county in New Jersey. Their selflessness, resourcefulness, and the diversity of their backgrounds and endeavors have improved the lives of countless people in need throughout the state."

"I was in awe that I was chosen, because we are working with a population that is often overlooked and misunderstood," said 2023 Honoree Tia Ryans, founder of F.O.R.T.E. House in Newark (Forcing Out Recidivism Through Education). F.O.R.T.E. House provides transitional housing and a positive, supportive environment for formerly incarcerated individuals pursuing secondary education. "I am honored to receive this award, because it will shine a light on something very important."

Nominations can be submitted through February 9, 2024 at RussBerrieMakingADifferenceAward.org.

“It’s incredibly impactful that the queer community is recognized, as LGBTQIA individuals are often left behind,” said Robt Martin Seda-Schreiber, a 2023 Honoree and chief activist at the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice in Princeton, a dedicated LGBTQIA safe space with supportive programs for queer youth, families, and elders. “This award amplifies my voice and allows us to bring the Rustin Center to the greater community.”

For more information, visit RussBerrieMakingADifferenceAward.org. Interviews and images are available upon request.