

CELEBRATING OPPORTUNITY AND INITIATIVE IN NEW JERSEY.

Neighborhood Builders® • Local Heroes • Student Leaders® • Community Volunteers

2011 Neighborhood Excellence Initiative®(NEI) awardees see opportunity and take the initiative to build a stronger New Jersey.

Robert Doherty, President of Bank of America New Jersey, invited all to celebrate their contributions to improving our communities and making New Jersey better for all of us at a November 1, 2011 ceremony held at the Newark Museum.

2011 awardees

Neighborhood Builders®

Elijah's Promise (New Brunswick)

Saint Joseph's Carpenter Society (Camden)

Local Heroes

Marvin Chasek (Habitat for Humanity/Plainfield)

Jack Egan (York Street Project/Jersey City)

Tim McLoone (founder, Holiday Express)

Jerri Morrison (founder, Young Scholars/Trenton)

Chip Paillex (founder, Grow A Row//Hunterdon)

Student Leaders®

Edwin Amar (Union City)

Nicole Billingslea (Plainfield)

Crysta Gonzalez (Vineland)

Ahmad Green-Hayes (Irvington)

Shagun Kukreja (Union)

Community Volunteer

Mark Cremonni (Merrill Lynch)



York Street Project was proud to nominate Jack, not only for his years of dedication to our children as a volunteer at The Nurturing Place, but for his tireless advocacy and love for the poor. Jack was unable to attend the dinner ceremony, where he was awarded a grant of \$5,000 that he generously dedicated to YSP, but the children gave him an even more fitting tribute at a breakfast celebration here in Jersey City. *For background about Jack, please keep reading.*

Why Jack Egan is Our Local Hero (in 400 words only)

Bank of America Local Hero Award Nomination 2011

For Jack Egan by York Street Project

Background: Tell us about the nominee's community involvement, activism, or history of time and effort in promoting community well-being. (12 characters remaining)

Jack ingrained himself into this community nearly 40 years ago and continues to be a true local hero. He came to downtown Jersey City as a parish priest, working in a mostly Latino parish, St. Boniface. He was a "street" priest whose passionate & relational personality connected him deeply with families, quickly becoming a beloved member of the community. Jack could be seen riding his bicycle around town and he even moved out of the rectory to live in a tenement among the people to try to stop the gentrification of downtown to save it for low-income families. The families still talk with him about their memories & how he positively shaped their lives. They tell him he still feels a part of their families and in fact, still invite him to major family events. After his refusal to leave his parish & subsequent 'retirement' from the priesthood, he remained an integral part of the community, volunteering with the York Street Project where he is a beloved friend of the children.

Tell us about the nominee's most significant accomplishments, how he/she has made a difference, and what it is that makes this individual a local hero. (3 characters remaining)

Jack's passion, dedication, & personal connection is seen in everything he does. His desire to be among the people sent him to Honduras & Panama for 3 years, where he became fluent in Spanish and the culture. Always involved in local, state & national peace & justice issues, he was a role model for the community. As co-founder of the Downtown Urban Housing Corporation, Jack led a group of advocates to develop the only sweat-equity housing project for the poor in NJ. The site for the project was 3 abandoned buildings consisting of 19 units on Barrow Street in Jersey City. Jack & a team of volunteers developed a partnership with the City's DCA to ensure the project would result in legal & long-term home ownership for the families. Working tirelessly to navigate the system & providing the spiritual energy needed to see the renovations through, 19 poor and mostly Latino families had a place to call home. In fact, some still own the homes, renovated and made livable with their own hands.

Identify any previous awards or honors that the nominee has received for his/her community involvement.

Jack has too many awards, citations, plaques, and medals to list but the return of his great and obvious love for the people is the best amongst them. **END**

More About Jack

Jack has been a part of the York Street Project and its affiliated work for more than 30 years. For the last 10 of these years, Jack has volunteered every Tuesday and Wednesday at The Nurturing Place. In that time he moved to Highland Lakes, New Jersey, which now is a two-hour trip each way, but that has not stopped him from coming faithfully. While here, Jack reads to our children, plays games with them, tells them his own life stories, and touches their lives with his endless love for them.

In celebration of his 10 years at TNP, Jack addressed last year's graduating kindergarten class with his beautiful sentiments, which you can read below.

Words of Gratitude by Jack Egan

The Nurturing Place Graduation

June 3, 2011

Two or three years ago, at The Nurturing Place graduation, the children sang a song I love! Especially moving is the line: "Each of us is a flower growing in Life's garden."

I wish to change just one word and say that each of us is a story growing in Life's garden. And each of us is a story totally unique and unrepeatable, just as is each flower or snowflake! Listen to this folks – there is no other Marvin, Bryan, Mariah, Seamus, William or Jaquan in the whole wide world of more than six billion humans. I repeat: "no other" and here's the beauty of Life and Creation, there never will be another Mariah, Seamus, William, Jaquan, Marvin or Bryan.

Therefore our main job as teachers and volunteers and especially parents is to do nothing to inhibit or block the unfolding story that is each child here today and here tomorrow. How do we do that? By loving each one of the children with all our hearts, with every fiber of our being. And, never, never judging them! Jesus said: "Judge not, lest you be judged." And the best way not to judge is to become a child, each child. Become a part of their story.

This is why, rather than ever thanking me for being a volunteer, now 10 years, I sincerely want to thank each child at The Nurturing Place – and the teachers and parents for allowing me to be ever a part of their unique and unrepeatable story. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!

And Marvin, Bryan, William, Jaquan, Mariah, Seamus – now that I have held your hands for a while, I'll hold my whole heart in your whole heart forever and beyond!

May you each be a Wonderful Story making our world a far better place than it now is!

**A man who thanks US for his volunteering —
truly, there is and never will be another Jack!**