

GARDEN STATE SEEDS OF  
**HOPE**

*the*  
**extra  
mile**

**Our 2014 Seeds of Hope honorees make  
New Jersey a better place for us all.**

To make a difference in the lives of others takes serious time and effort. Those who give of themselves to assist neighbors in need or to support a worthy cause deserve recognition. For more than a decade, *New Jersey Monthly* has cited—and celebrated—the work of our state's most dedicated volunteers with the annual Seeds of Hope awards. On the following pages, we profile this year's honorees.

The 2014 winners were chosen from a pool of nominees by our

judges: Sally Glick, principal of Sobel & Co.; Christine Healy, president of the Healy Education Foundation; David H. Kerr, founder/president emeritus, Integrity House; Kathleen Palmer, director, Studio 7 Fine Art Gallery; and Paul

Silverman, principal, Silverman: Building Neighborhoods.

The honorees will be saluted at a luncheon on September 19 at Crystal Plaza in Livingston. The event is sponsored by Crystal Plaza and PNC Wealth Management.

**OUR 2014 HONOREES**

***Eric Fuchs-Stengel***

***Kristen Gillette***

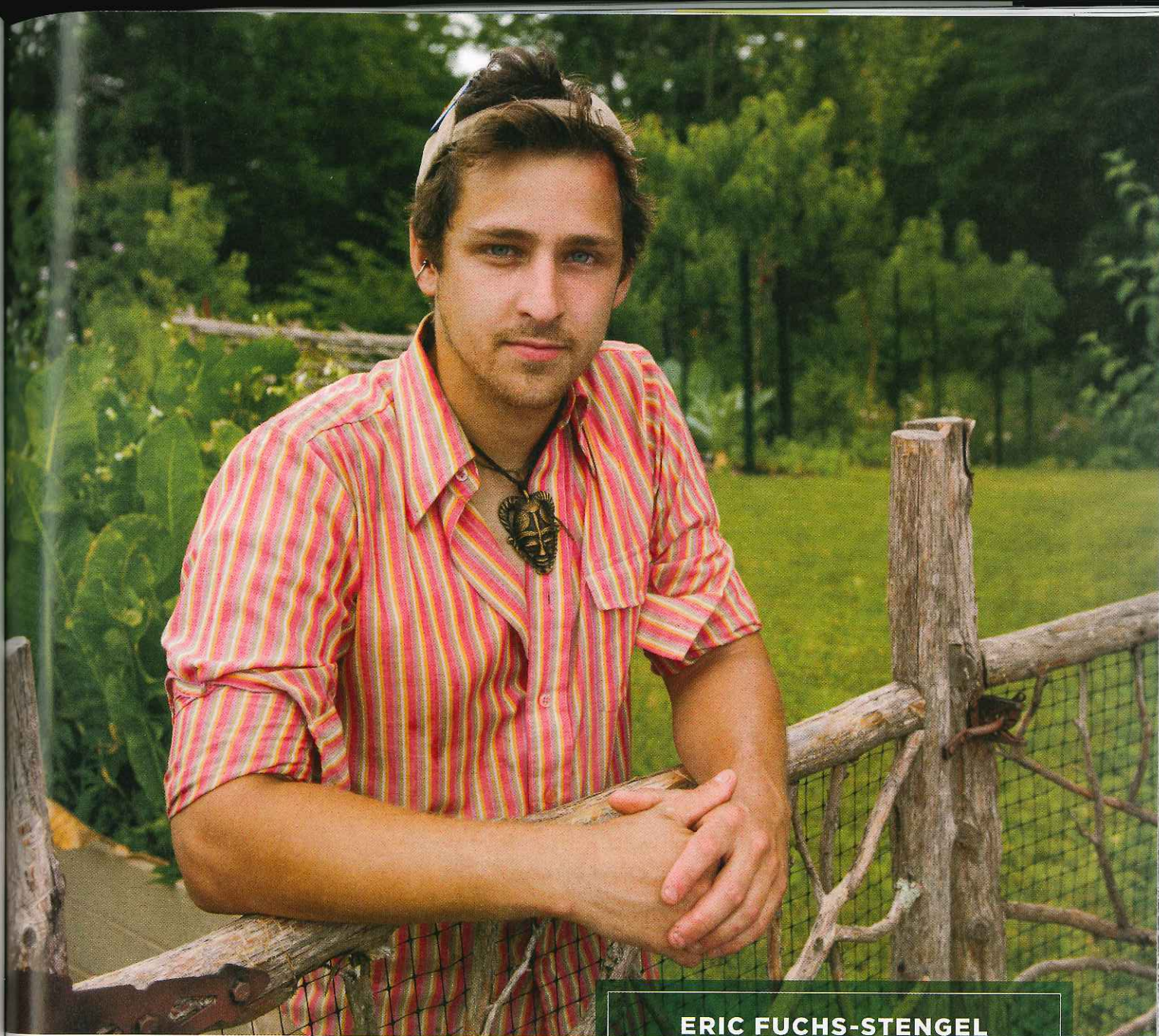
***TJ Nelligan***

***Zachary Brooks***

***Christine Callahan***

PHOTOS BY JOHN EMERSON





## ERIC FUCHS-STENDEL

Mahwah Environmental Volunteer Organization  
MAHWAH

### *Blazing a Trail*

**Growing up in suburban Mahwah,** Eric Fuchs-Stengel was into video games. Lots of video games. Finally, he realized enough was enough. In June 2006, at age 16, he started the Mahwah Environmental Volunteer Organization (MEVO) in hopes of tearing young people away from their TV screens and engaging them in the natural environment—mainly, the more than 3,000 acres of preserved forests in northern Passaic and Bergen counties.

“My friends and I got sick of being indoors,” says Fuchs-Stengel, now 22. “It seemed endless and had no benefit.”

MEVO organizes weekly cleanups at Stag Hill, an area that is home to many members of the area’s Ramapough Lenape Nation. MEVO volunteers work with the Lenape to remove waste—including car parts, asphalt, construc-

tion debris and plastic—that had been dumped there illegally and continues to pollute the area, posing a toxic threat to groundwater.

The all-volunteer organization also focuses on education as a way to build an environmentally sustainable society. The volunteers visit schools to teach students about where food comes from and how it grows. MEVO holds workshops on land in Mahwah, Ramsey and at Bergen Community College, where the group maintains organic farms, beehives and gardens. MEVO donates the produce it grows to local groups that combat hunger.

Fuchs-Stengel, who recently graduated from NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Studies, where he hand-tailored his major in ecological sustainability and social change, was a 2014 recipient of the Jacqueline Kennedy

Onassis Award for Outstanding Public Service Benefitting Local Communities, a category of the prestigious National Jefferson Awards for Public Service. He is one of only 200 trailblazers to win the award since its inception in 1974.

Sharon von Euler, former environmental club advisor at Mahwah High School, says she is not surprised that MEVO hit the ground running, given Fuchs-Stengel’s leadership. She believes the organization could someday attract corporate sponsors—a development that would allow Fuchs-Stengel to make MEVO his life’s work.

“Eric’s an upstanding person with an outstanding amount of determination,” says von Euler, whose dining room once served as a meeting place for MEVO. “He wants to do anything he’s able to do, and that hasn’t changed since he was 16 years old.” —*Dana Inez*