



## CAMDEN CITY GARDEN CLUB, INC

Operator

### Camden Children's Garden

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### Mike Devlin, of the The Camden City Garden Club & the Camden Children's Garden is nominated for Governor Christie's NJ Hero Award

**CAMDEN, N. J.** (January 25, 2010) As per the 2010 Christie-Guadagno Inauguration theme, "Rebuilding New Jersey Together: Pride through Service and Community," Mike Devlin of the Camden City Garden Club/Camden Children's Garden was nominated as one of New Jersey's own heroes. The nominees were reviewed by a committee headed up by New Jersey's future First Lady, Mary Pat Christie. To see a list of the 5 winners, visit [www.njinaugural2010.com/njheroes](http://www.njinaugural2010.com/njheroes).



Although Mike was not selected as one of the five of the New Jersey Hero nominees to attend the inaugural events, the NJ Inaugural 2010 Committee salutes these and all the men and women around our great state who donate their time to causes they believe in and are working to make their communities a better place" The committee received hundreds of nominations, representing a cross section of men and women from all corners of the state who quietly serve others and their community.

Mike Devlin was nominated by Virginia Korteweg, of River Edge, NJ in Bergen County, and longtime associate of Mike Devlin. Virginia and Mike have worked together for 10 years through many local and national gardening organizations. Mike's work was saluted by the committee with this statement: In addition, Mike was also nominated by Camden City Garden Club Board Members and volunteers Gladis Zambrana, who has been working with Mike for decades in various Camden community projects. The NJ Heroes nomination stated the following:

"Mike Devlin was nominated for his work as President of the Camden City Garden Club, which has built thirty-one new community gardens in Camden under his leadership. Because of these new community gardens, residents of Camden can grow their own fresh food that would otherwise be difficult to find due to a lack of supermarkets inside city limits."

To see a full list of the nominees, please visit [here www.njinaugural2010.com/njheroes2.html](http://www.njinaugural2010.com/njheroes2.html). The Governor stated: "The interest in the New Jersey Heroes program was greater than we ever expected and we were overwhelmed by the excitement with which people offered up their friends, relatives and neighbors for this simple honor," said New Jersey Inaugural 2010 Committee Chairman Todd Christie. "The stories shared with us over the past weeks have been inspiring and humbling and are truly a reminder that anyone can do amazing things for others and their communities. Choosing only five people

out of all the extraordinary nominees to represent this program was an immense challenge. I offer my thanks to all who were nominated for their work and dedication to their communities. New Jersey is a better place because of these men and women."

Mike Devlin and the Camden City Garden Club/Camden Children's Garden would like to congratulate the winners and nominees their tremendous support to neighbors in need throughout New Jersey. Also we would like to thank the Governor and his staff for their dedication to those helping New Jersey to grow and for their campaign to "Rebuild New Jersey Together: Pride through Service and Community".

### ABOUT MIKE DEVLIN & HIS SERVICE TO CAMDEN

In 1985, Mike Devlin and his wife, Valerie Frick, founded Camden City Garden Club, Inc. (CCGC), an organization that has been greening, beautifying and helping feed the people of Camden, NJ for 26 years. The Club is a non-profit (501)(c)(3) environmental and educational organization. Originally formed for the purpose of assisting Camden City residents with community gardening and beautification, the Club membership has expanded to serve 85 families, 34 community organizations and 24 churches today! The Club is responsible for the creation and cultivation of over 60 community gardens around the City of Camden, 31 of the gardens were created in 2009 alone. Mike and Valerie's vision soon grew to consider the needs of Camden's youth and families, and the Garden Club expanded to include a variety of youth-oriented, community-enhancing programs. Mike is the Executive Director of the Camden Children's Garden, and is the co-founder/co-developer of the Camden Children's Garden, an \$8 million, 4.5 acre educational attraction on the Camden Waterfront. His duties at the Garden including overall management and supervision of all programs He is also responsible for planning, fundraising, design and exhibit planning.



Mike and Valerie have been winning awards since they started. Val was recently honored as a "Woman of Distinction" by the *Phila. Business Journal*.

In their 26 years of work, Mike has won numerous awards from reputable organizations and is nominated consistently for many more. Longtime gardeners in Camden, Mike and Valerie were named co-winners in 1985 of the Silver Trowel Award, given by the *Victory Garden* show on PBS for the "Best Home Garden in America." Then Governor Tom Kean also recognized them for this award. A year later, Governor Kean awarded the first state grant to the CCGC for community gardening. In 1988, Governor Kean presented a *State Glitter Award* to the CCGC for its environmental work. The same year, President George H.W. Bush presented the *Take Pride in America Award* to Mike and the CCGC at a White House ceremony for their environmental work. In 1992, they attended the first national symposium on children's gardening, and were inspired by Jane L. Taylor's account of her garden for children at Michigan State University to envision a garden in Camden where children could learn about plants in a safe environment. Christie Whitman personally

supported this project in a promotional video entitled, *Growing the Cam Governor den Children's Garden*, and the Garden was built and opened to the public in 1999. On two occasions, Governor Whitman held conferences and meetings at the Children's Garden. Governor and Mrs. Donald DeFrancesco supported the CCGC Philadelphia Flower Show exhibit and the building of the Philadelphia Eagles Butterfly House. They also initiated the first annual Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) *Celebrate Children* event at the Camden Children's Garden for Adopted and Foster children of Camden. In December 2001, Governor DeFrancesco presented the *State of NJ Dept. of Human Services Division of Youth & Family Services Award of Appreciation* at a ceremony at the Trenton War Memorial.

In 2007, Mike received the Hometown Hero Award from the Campbell Soup Company. In 2008, the couple was selected by the American Horticultural Society's Great American Gardeners Awards

Committee to receive the Jane L. Taylor Award, given to an inspirational individual/organization that has nurtured future horticulturalists through efforts in children's and youth gardening. This is the highest national award anyone could receive for working with children and horticulture. The Camden Children's Garden also participated in hosting the 2008 American Horticultural Society's Annual National Children and Youth Gardening Symposium; moreover, Mike and Val were honored as expert speakers at the Symposium. In 2008, Mike and Val received the AmeriCorps NCCC the *Sponsor of the Year Award*. In 2009, Mike asked Camden City Council to create Camden's first Food Security Council to take action by providing Camden residents with better access fresh and healthy food. In 2010, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recognized the CCGC for their 2009 community gardening efforts in creating 31 new gardens in 2009 by featuring the program and its gardens on their annual New Year's Card to partners and grantees. The list of awards and accomplishments keeps growing as this inspirational couple continue to cultivate and grow the amazing programs that they founded many years ago to nurture a community in need.

Mike and his wife have developed amazing programs to assist the residents of Camden with sustainable education and programming:

### PROGRAMS OF CAMDEN CITY GARDEN CLUB, INC.

 **Community Gardening/Community Development** program is celebrating its 26th season! Through this program, the Garden Club cleans up trash-strewn lots to beautify communities. Camden residents assist and learn as they work hand-in-hand with the Club to create and maintain scores of food-producing community garden sites throughout the city, as well as assisting with tree plantings and greening projects.

In 2009, the Club partnered with 24 Camden churches and faith-based organizations to fight childhood obesity through community gardening and nutrition education. This was supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as part of an innovative faith-based initiative. This year alone, the Club has created **31** new community gardens - **25** of them faith-based! Also this year, the number of vegetable and flower transplants that are distributed annually to gardeners throughout the City of Camden has increased by 50 percent, to about 150,000. In addition, the program offers workshops and barbeques to teach the urban gardeners how best to cultivate their sites and to prepare healthy meals. For a modest fee, the Club also supplies gardeners with materials such as compost, fencing, seeds, plants and fertilizer. The Garden staff is assisted in these endeavors by members of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and Camden residents.

 **Grow Lab**, now in its 21st year, is a hands-on, indoor classroom gardening program that utilizes mini-greenhouses. It emphasizes science, environmental science, nutrition and math through horticulture. The staff visits classes once every two weeks to teach lessons and monitor progress. The program serves 31 classes in the City of Camden, as well as daycare centers.

 **Youth Employment and Training Program** completed its 16<sup>th</sup> successful year. This program gives local teens job experience working with the community through the Club's various programs. We have employed over 300 Camden Youth, and to our knowledge only one has dropped out of high school in a city with over a 60% drop-out rate. The youth earn an income, learn basic job skills, and are taught horticulture, science, landscaping and interpersonal skills.

 **The Camden Children's Garden**, now in its 11th year, is designed for children and families. It is a special place to explore and discover the natural world. This 4.5-acre garden features a variety of themed educational exhibits for children for creative and imaginative play, such as the Dinosaur Garden, a Giant Picnic Garden, Storybook Gardens, Red Oak Run and Tree House, Cityscapes Garden and more! Enjoy great indoor attractions including the Philadelphia Eagles Four Seasons Butterfly House, Plaza de Aibonito, our Puerto Rican tropical greenhouse exhibit, and Benjamin Franklin's Secret Garden and

Workshop. Enjoy the carousel, Arrow River Express Train Ride, and Spring Butterfly Ride for a modest fee. Garden Festivals are family-oriented special events held at the Garden on the second and fourth weekends of the month, from April through November. The Garden invites visitors to enjoy the Enchanted Annual Holiday Festival of Lights through each holiday season.

 **Educational Programs** are offered by the Camden Children's Garden, both on-site and through distance-learning (via video conferencing). More than 30 lessons are offered on various topics, tailored by grade level aligned to State Education Standards.

 **The Philadelphia Flower Show** is a highlight on the Garden's calendar. Since 1997, the Garden has staged a major exhibit to promote the Camden City Garden Club, the Children's Garden, and the Camden Waterfront, as well as to showcase the CCGC educational and environmental work. In 2010, the CCGC exhibit, entitled "Soup and Salad: From Camden to the World" will promote healthy eating, community gardening and the exhibit will return to the newly expanded Campbell Soup Company Headquarters in Camden, NJ - to be dedicated in May 2010.

### MIKE'S HISTORY

**Michael Henry Cawthray Devlin** was born in Teaneck, New Jersey in 1948. With growing up in Bergenfield, NJ, Mike developed a love of gardening from the young age of two living with his English Grandmother. Mike attended Bergen County Vocational Technical School Hackensack, NJ, where he learned the trade of plumbing. After graduating from high school, Mike completed his Five Year Plumber's Apprenticeship and worked as a Journeyman Plumber as he attended and graduated from Columbia University with a B.A. in Government & History.

Mike then came to Camden as a law student at Rutgers Law School, during which Mike worked from 1975 through 1999 for the City of Camden including serving as Councilman of the First Ward, Solicitor/Member Camden City Planning Board; Department of Law, Attorney and Law Clerk; Director of the CETA Title X Mr. Fixit Program, and Deputy Director Summer Youth Employment Program. While employed by the City, Mike met his wife Valerie Frick, a Camden resident, educator and another gardening enthusiast. Together, Mike and Valerie realized the City's need for educational and gardening programs; therefore, when the William Penn Foundation came to Camden to start a Community Gardening Program, Mike wrote the grant and so their community gardening legacy began....

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