Inquirer Editorial: In Philly and the region, a wealth of good citizens

When Inquirer readers have been asked to single out neighbors exemplifying citizenship in the best sense, the list grows and grows. In the run-up to selecting a Citizen of the Year on Sunday for the ninth time, that's been just as true as ever.

The field of contenders reveals any number of candidates worthy of the honor. These nominees of readers and the Editorial Board are working to make their communities safer for children, reaching out to those in need, fighting homelessness, beautifying the landscape, assuring the right to vote, and preserving educational choices and the city's cultural heritage.

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia physician Cindy W. Christian was nominated for her recent role on a governor's task force in crafting sweeping changes to Pennsylvania child-protection laws in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky child-abuse scandal. Christian also teaches and directs a special center on abuse at CHOP.

Another health-care professional lauded for her work in the trenches is Donna L. Torrisi, the nurse-practitioner who founded the Family Practice & Counseling Network, now in its 20th year serving the poor and uninsured.

A previous nominee, Neha Gupta, continues her good work with the nonprofit Empower Orphans, which she founded as a young girl to support a range of causes both here and abroad - and she's still in her teen years.

Helping people facing crises meet basic needs has been a goal for several nominees. David Girgenti, a New Jersey marketing executive, recently added Sandy victims to his social networking site that helps benefactors grant wishes that are posted online. At his own expense, child psychologist Steven E. Samuel distributes hundreds of turkeys...
around Philadelphia. And for Adam Bruckner, his faith-based mission at the Philly Restart nonprofit includes helping the homeless acquire IDs needed to find work and vote.

Leaving insurance giant CIGNA after a 31-year career, former top executive H. Edward Hanway was applauded for chairing a nonprofit that has taken over running 17 Catholic high schools as the Archdiocese of Philadelphia struggles with downsizing.

Also on the parochial schools front, Kathy Ott Lovell was noted for leading a campaign to raise $1 million to keep St. Hubert Catholic High School for Girls afloat. At the grade-school level, Sisters of St. Joseph Dolores Egner and Jane Field were celebrated for being “the backbone” at Visitation BVM School in gritty Kensington.

The closing of Robin’s Bookstore this year offers a chance to salute founder Larry Robin, a fixture on the city’s cultural scene. Robin founded an annual festival on black writing and educational programs at the nonprofit Moonstone Arts Center.

For Mary Tracy, a stalwart in the fight against billboard blight in the city, her work as head of Scenic America brought her national attention. Fortunately, Tracy also remained focused on her hometown—warning city officials against the unchecked proliferation of digital signs.

Finally, Brenda Jones, a cancer survivor herself, was nominated for making hundreds of comfy, colorful wraps through her nonprofit Hug Wraps. The robes are given to cancer patients as an alternative to impersonal hospital gowns.

Indeed, these and many other individuals doing good works have embraced their communities in a spirit of citizenship that should warm the entire region’s heart.